

## The Ismā'īlī Da'wa and the Fātimid caliphate

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With the proclamation of his caliphate in January 910, al-Mahdī, the first of the Fātimid rulers, celebrated the culmination of a clandestine struggle that had deep roots and varying fortunes in many Islamic territories far from the north African scene of his ultimate triumph. His rise to power occurred not in the eastern areas of Iran and Iraq, where his immediate ancestors were born, or at his recent headquarters at the town of Salamiya in north central Syria, or in the Yemen or any of the other regions where his followers had been active. Al-Mahdī was already recognized as the supreme religious leader, the imam, of the Ismā'īlī Shi'ites by his loyal adherents, but he had not, until then, governed a politically defined realm; nor had there been in Islam as a whole another Shi'ite caliph except for 'Ali ibn Abī Tālib two and a half centuries earlier. Al-Mahdī's ascension was, in his own view and that of his followers, a restoration, a revolution in which the wrongs of 250 years were redressed by the combining at last of the divinely sanctioned imamate and the caliphate in one office. He would henceforth guide the Islamic community as God had always intended, and as his ancestors the Prophet Muḥammad and Muḥammad's sole legitimate heir 'Ali had done. His immediate goal was to return Islam to its true and proper form by bringing those who most loved the family of the prophet back into positions of authority. He would, moreover, fight against the enemies of Islam both abroad and at home; the 'Abbāsid usurpers were thus served notice that their own claim to rule would no longer be without a rival. The Fātimids, although then in control of only parts of what constitute modern Tunisia, Algeria, Libya and Sicily, aimed at an empire as large as Islam itself.

In 969 the dream expressed in their earliest proclamations was to be sustained by a second culmination. In that year the fourth of the Fātimid caliphs, al-Mu'izz, saw his commander-in-chief, Jawhar, conquer Egypt and found there a new capital, al-Qāhira, the modern Cairo. Although it was not necessarily the primary purpose of its foundation, Cairo became thereafter the center of the Fātimid empire; and Egypt became an independent state for

the first time since the coming of Islam. The new city Cairo was also to become the headquarters of an even greater religious network. As imāms, the Fātimids were the infallible arbiters of Islam and, for their followers everywhere, they were the single focus and the absolute core of religious devotion. The true meaning of Islam, which resided in the person of the imam-caliph, would henceforth also radiate from Cairo and remain there as long as the Fātimids were to rule from Egypt.

Naturally, these developments meant, and in a sense continue to mean, a variety of things according to the religious inclinations of those who observed them. The Fātimid caliphate began, as its name indicates, as a restoration of the rights of ‘Ali’s family as descended from ‘Ali’s sons by the prophet’s daughter Fātima (and not by the offspring of his son Muhammad whose mother was a Hanafite woman). In asserting this claim, al-Mahdi and his descendants indicated the sacred lineage that tied them directly back to the prophet and to ‘Ali and Fātima. The term “Ismā‘ili” was not used by the Fātimids except informally, although it has become, in more recent periods, a proper name for modern adherents of these same imams – especially now for the followers of the Agā Khāns, who are themselves said to be direct lineal descendants of the first eight Fātimid caliphs. Nevertheless, even in the medieval Islamic literature about Shi‘ite sectarian divisions, the term *Ismā‘ili* or *Ismā‘iliyya*, was commonly employed as a name for those Shi‘a who upheld the imamate of Ismā‘il the son of the imam Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq, who was himself the great-grandson of ‘Ali’s son al-Ḥusayn. The actual conditions of the succession to Ja‘far, however, about which not much is known in any case, are not easily described by a single term, and the origin of the Fātimids, which was never clear and which became a subject of intense polemical debate, requires more detail than is afforded by the singular designation “Ismā‘ili.”<sup>1</sup>

### *The origin of the Ismā‘ili Da‘wa*

Our oldest and presumably most reliable authorities agree that Ja‘far designated his second son Ismā‘il to succeed him as imam.<sup>2</sup> Ismā‘il, however, died before his father and yet he was not replaced, at least not

<sup>1</sup> On the name *Ismā‘ili*, see F. Daftary, *The Ismā‘ilis: Their history and doctrines* (Cambridge, 1990), 93–97; H. Halm, *Das Reich des Mahdi: Der Aufstieg der Fātimiden* (875–973) (Munich, 1991), 25, trans. M. Bonner as *The Empire of the Mahdi: The Rise of the Fātimids*, (Leiden, 1996), 17. For a general overview of the origin and development of the Ismā‘ilis as a sect, see Wilferd Madelung’s article “Ismā‘iliyya,” in *EI2* as well as the work of Daftary just cited. Madelung’s pioneering study of the Ismā‘ili doctrine of the imāmate in its various phases (“Das Imamat in der Frühen ismailitischen Lehre”), *Der Islam*, 37 (1961), 43–135) remains basic although carefully summarized and revisited by Daftary and Halm.

<sup>2</sup> al-Ḥasan ibn Mūsā al-Nawbakhti, *Firaq al-Shi‘a*, ed. H. Ritter, (Istanbul, 1931), 55;

explicitly. Upon the death of Ja'far, the Shi'ite community fell into confusion concerning the person of the imām, although in theory an imām must exist at all times. The possibilities proposed at the time varied considerably but among them two are of particular importance in regard to the Fāṭimids. Many followers of Ja'far quickly accepted his oldest son 'Abdallāh as the imam. However, he, according to these same reports, died shortly thereafter without male issue and thus his imamate was denied since he had obviously failed to pass it on as required by theory. Most of his Shi'a (his "followers") reverted to another son of Ja'far, Mūsā. Nonetheless, what makes 'Abdallāh's initial succession of special interest is the claim by al-Mahdī, long afterward, in a letter to his followers in the Yemen, that he was actually a direct descendant of this same son of Ja'far.<sup>3</sup> A second group argued, in contrast to the others, that the imamate, once given to Ismā'il by explicit designation, could not move laterally to another of Ja'far's sons. Rather, for them, it continued from Ismā'il to Ismā'il's own son Muḥammad. In their view, Muḥammad ibn Ismā'il had assumed the imamate either at his father's death or at that of his grandfather Ja'far. There were also several variations of such a succession, each with adherents, and the names of some leaders for these factions are known, notably al-Mubārak ibn 'Alī al-'Abdī and the group called after him al-Mubārakiyya.<sup>4</sup>

Ja'far al-Ṣādiq died in 765 and the conditions just outlined apply to the period immediately thereafter. Nothing appears in our sources about any of this, however, until well over a century later. When finally the claims concerning Muḥammad ibn Ismā'il and these alternate avenues of succession to Ja'far first resurface, they are associated with the term *Qarmatī*, the earliest instance of which occurs in the title of an Imāmī Shi'ite refutation of Qarmatian doctrines written prior to 873-4. Despite this evidence, in Islamic historical writings, the word *Qarmatī* begins as an adjective from the name Qarmaṭ as applied to a mysterious propagator of Ismā'ilī religious teachings called in these sources simply Ḥamdān Qarmaṭ. He was active in

Sa'ad ibn al-Qummi, *al-Maqālāt wa'l-firaq*, ed. M. J. Mashkūr (Tehran, 1963), 78; Daftary, *Ismā'ilis*, 93-94.

<sup>3</sup> For the text of the letter and an analysis of it, see first Husayn F. Hamdani, *On the Genealogy of the Fāṭimid Caliphs* (Cairo, 1958), and second Abbas Hamdani and F. de Blois, "A Re-examination of Al-Mahdī's Letter to the Yemenites on the Genealogy of the Fāṭimid Caliphs," *JRAS* (1983), 2, 173-207, as well as Daftary, *Ismā'ilis*, 108, 128.

<sup>4</sup> The Mubārakiyya and their leader were recognized by, among other early sources, al-Nawbakhti (*Firaq*, 58) but later Fāṭimid claims insisted that Mubārak was a pseudonym for Muḥammad ibn Ismā'il himself. See the discussion by Daftary, *Ismā'ilis*, 96-97, 102-3, 112. However, a newly discovered source from an early period, written by Ibn al-Aswad, a north African Shi'i who later supported the Fāṭimids, not only mentions this group but gives the full name of the *mawla* of Ismā'il ibn Ja'far who instigated it, strongly suggesting thereby that al-Nawbakhti's information is correct. See Paul E. Walker, "The Resolution of the Shi'ah," in L. Clarke, (ed.) *The Party of Ali*, (forthcoming).

the rural Sawād around the Iraqi city of Kūfa from 877 onward.<sup>5</sup> The Qarāmita (plural of *Qarmatī*) – presumably his followers – believed, according to the accounts taken from captives and renegade informants at a slightly later period, that the current imām was the same Muḥammad ibn Ismā‘il who had succeeded Ja‘far. According to them, he was at that time in occultation but about to return and lay claim to supreme lordship over the Islamic realm. When he does, acting as the messiah, he will, they also believed, end the imposition of religious law and usher in the form of paradise that once existed for Adam.<sup>6</sup>

The connection between the “Ismā‘ili” groups of the eighth century, from which the name derives, and these later manifestations is, however, quite uncertain. It is known, nevertheless, that Ḥamdān Qarmat and his brother-in-law ‘Abdān, the first recorded advocates for the cause of Muḥammad ibn Ismā‘il in this later form, were acting on instructions from a single central leadership. From among those recruited in Iraq and those who joined the movement elsewhere, more agents were dispatched by this same leadership to yet other territories in subsequent years. Ibn Hawshab, later called Maṇṣūr al-Yaman (“Conqueror of the Yemen”), and his associate ‘Ali ibn al-Fadl were sent to open an Ismā‘ili mission in the Yemen in 880. From there yet another “missionary” went on to India in 883. More such agents began to penetrate northern Iran and then, later, Khurasan.

The general term for these missionaries is *dā‘i*, which means one who appeals for adherence and loyalty to a specific cause. The general concept is subsumed in the word *da‘wa*, which here preserves its Qur’ānic sense of “summons” as in Muḥammad’s summoning his followers to Islam (Muḥammad was God’s *dā‘i*), as well as the appeal for devotion to a particular leader as imam. Even more, for the Ismā‘ilis, it denotes a tightly controlled organization that served to propagate a religious message and spread the movement. All members entered the *da‘wa* by swearing an oath of allegiance and accepting a covenant of obedience to its leader. By the time of its rapid proliferation in the final decades of the third/ninth century, the Ismā‘ili mission recognized a resident of Salamiya in Syria as supreme head;

<sup>5</sup> The most important modern study of the Qarmatians is Wilferd Madelung’s “Fātimiden und Bahrainqarmaten,” in *Der Islam*, 34 (1959), 34–88, trans. (slightly revised) as “The Fātimids and the Qarmatīs of Bahrayn,” in F. Daftary (ed.), *Mediaeval Isma‘ili History & Thought* (Cambridge, 1996), 21–73. Much of this material was summarized by Madelung in the articles in “Ḥamdān Qarmat” and “Qarmatī” *EJ2*. There are also good general accounts by Daftary, *Ismā‘ilis*, ch. 3: “Early Ismā‘ilism,” and, the most up to date, by Halm, *Reich des Mahdi*, “Der geheime Orden,” 15–60, “The Secret Order,” 5–57.

<sup>6</sup> This information about Qarmatian doctrines has been collected and summarized most recently by Daftary, *Ismā‘ilis*, 104–5; Daftary, “Carmatians,” *EIR*; Halm, *Reich des Mahdi*, 24–9, 33–38, 225–26, trans. 16–22, 26–31, 250–52.

he was, in the terminology of that period, the *bujja*, which apparently did not mean imām but rather his highest visible representative.<sup>7</sup>

Along with the other missions of the period, including the important effort of the Qarmaṭian Abū Sa'īd al-Jannābī in Bahrayn, yet another, begun even prior to 893, was eventually to become crucial in the foundation of the Fātimid empire. Abū 'Abdallāh al-Shī'i and his older brother Abu'l-'Abbās were recruited in their home town of Kūfa by an agent named Abū 'Ali and sent to Egypt in about 891. Abu'l-'Abbās entered service in the *da'wa* as a courier between Egypt and Salamiya, while Abū 'Abdallāh set off for Mecca and then Yemen where he was to be trained by Ibn Hawshab. In the year 893, he and another *dā'i* went north from the Yemen on the pilgrimage and, while in Mecca, befriended a group of Berber Muslims from the tribe of Kutāma. The two Ismā'ilī agents then accompanied the returning Berbers, first to Egypt and then, at the urging of the Kutāma pilgrims themselves, onward across north Africa toward their home region in the Lesser Kabylia mountains of eastern Algeria. It is hard to say now whether Abū 'Abdallāh had planned his venture in accord with fairly explicit instructions from his supervisors or whether, as our only source seems to insist, he simply followed the course of expediency in response to opportunities that presented themselves. In any case he had reached and established an independent base in the middle of Kutāma territory at a place called Īkjān by the end of 893.<sup>8</sup>

The spread of the Ismā'ilī *da'wa* by this time was impressively wide, reaching and included significant cells in Iraq, Iran, Syria, Bahrayn, the Yemen, and the Maghreb; the number of Ismā'ilīs in all these places was growing rapidly, particularly in rural Iraq, the Yemen and north Africa, but also with large pockets in many cities and other regions. Despite these undeniable successes, in 286/899, which is probably the death date of the leader in Salamiya, a new figure assumed charge of the *da'wa* and announced to the many varied Ismā'ilī communities that, henceforth, rather than use the title *bujja*, which had indicated the chief agent of the absent Muhammad ibn Isma'il, he intended now openly to claim the imamate for himself as the true lineal descendent of the only valid line of imams. He announced that the imamate, instead of depending on the reemergence of the long absent Muhammad ibn Ismā'il, had, in reality, actively continued in his family all along. The newly revealed imam was by name, at least

<sup>7</sup> On the use of this term in this context, see Daftary, *Ismā'ilis*, 127–8; Halm, *Reich des Mahdi*, 29–30, 61–64, trans. 22, 62–64.

<sup>8</sup> Qādī al-Nu'mān, *Iftitāh al-da'wa wa ibtidā' al-dawla*, ed. Wadad Kadi (Beirut, 1970), and by Farhat Dachraoui (Tunis, 1975). The exact location of Īkjān is now known only approximately, in part because no direct physical evidence of it outlasted its use in this one relatively brief period. However, it was east of, and perhaps fairly near, Setif and certainly west-northwest of Constantine in what is modern Algeria.

according to some sources, Sa‘id ibn al-Husayn, and he was the nephew of the previous leader. But he was also the grandson of Ahmad and his father ‘Abdallāh, who were the leaders prior to his uncle. Moreover, his uncle had properly designated him as the new leader and therefore his right to lead was not in question. His claim to the imamate, however, was met with immediate skepticism and rejection by some Ismā‘īlis while at the same time receiving support and acceptance by others. Many of the eastern groups broke away thereafter, preferring to maintain the imamate of Muḥammad ibn Ismā‘il in occultation, who they believed, moreover, was then about to return as the messiah. ‘Abbāsid authorities, who had begun to be alarmed by the increasing strength of the Ismā‘īlis, now found ways to ascribe reprehensible antinomian excesses to groups they continued to call the Qarmatians, a term that stuck and was later used to cover all of the non-Fātimid Ismā‘īlis. Originally, these were, in the main, the Ismā‘īlis who rejected Sa‘id ibn al-Husayn’s imamate in 899, as well as his subsequent assumption of the caliphate in 910 as al-Mahdi, the first of the Fātimids.<sup>9</sup>

An ambiguity among members of the *da‘wa* in respect to these troubling circumstances is also attested by our sources. On behalf of the *da‘wa* in Iraq, ‘Abdān, for example, declined to give support for the change, but others remained loyal to Salamiya, including among them his brother-in-law Ḥamdān Qarmaṭ, who now disappears from Qarmatian sources, having left Iraq and changed his name.<sup>10</sup> As yet another sign of the conflict, a loyal Iraqi *dā‘i* Zikrawayh arranged ‘Abdān’s murder to silence him. Farther east the *da‘wa* likewise wavered, and it is not clear which of the *dā‘is*, if any at all, were partial to the new Ismā‘īli doctrine as opposed to the older Qarmatian teaching. Most significantly, the recently formed Qarmatian community of Bahrayn ceased to accept the leadership of Salamiya altogether, and repercussions of this separation remained serious for the Fātimids up to and including the conquest of Egypt and the founding of Cairo.<sup>11</sup>

Therefore, although faced with an internal revolt, Sa‘id could nevertheless depend on crucial support in certain quarters. Ibn Hawshab and much of the Yemen held firm, as did Abū ‘Abdallāh in the Maghrib. The *dā‘i* Zikrawayh, however, although not necessarily completely hostile, began on his own an adventure that was certainly not condoned by Salamiya. Three of his sons went into the Syrian desert and converted substantial numbers of tribesmen either in the name of the new imām or of that of one of themselves as if,

<sup>9</sup> Daftary, *Ismā‘īlis*, 125–30; Halm, *Reich des Mahdi*, 61–7, trans. 58–66.

<sup>10</sup> Apparently Ḥamdān Qarmaṭ at first sided with his brother-in-law in rejecting the new initiative but, not long after this revolt began, changed his position and resumed his former loyalty to the central leadership.

<sup>11</sup> Halm, *Reich des Mahdi*, 225–36, 334–35, 337–41, trans. 250–63, 377–78, 380–85, and Daftary, *Ismā‘īlis*, 126.

according to one version, one of the brothers was actually Muḥammad ibn Ismā‘il himself reappeared at last. The goal of this revolt was Salamiya, and ‘Abbāsid intelligence sources quickly made a connection between it and the person they were intended to see as merely a rich and noble merchant who happened to live in that city. Sa‘id’s position was compromised and the previously clandestine Ismā‘ili movement was about to be fully exposed. Possibly, the ‘Abbāsids already knew about Salamiya; in any case they could now no longer afford to delay action. While the Syrian Qarmatian followers of the sons of Zikrawayh marched to Ismā‘ili headquarters in Salamiya in an effort to coopt the leadership, an ‘Abbāsid army moved from Iraq against them.<sup>12</sup>

Unable to trust the Qarmatians, Sa‘id decided to flee Salamiya and did so in haste, leaving behind family and much of the accumulated wealth and possessions that had been acquired in secret over the years as the contributions of the Ismā‘ilis were passed up through the *da‘wa* to the supreme leadership. His home in Salamiya had become the material as well as the intellectual center of Ismā‘ilism. Now, with a few servants and with his young son and eventual successor, he traveled south to Ramla where he awaited the outcome of the Syrian revolt. Even then he obviously hoped to recover his hold over most of his former following.<sup>13</sup>

The prematurely violent confrontation by the sons of Zikrawayh with ‘Abbāsid authorities, however, not only ended badly for them but soon forced Sa‘id to continue his flight into Egypt. The ‘Abbāsids were determined to capture him. In Egypt, he eluded them and was carefully shielded by his local *da‘wa*, then directed by a man named in most sources simply as Abū ‘Ali but who was clearly a major figure. In fact, although one Fātimid source, the personal memoirs of Sa‘id’s manservant, Ja‘far, places the main *dā‘i* from Salamiya, someone named simply Firūz, in the position of chief of the *da‘wa* (the *bāb al-abwāb*), other sources having greater credence state that the head of the *da‘wa* was then, in fact, this same Abū ‘Ali. The geographer Ibn Hawqal, moreover, who was himself a Fātimid supporter, later knew Abū ‘Ali’s son personally. He reports that Abū ‘Ali was none other than Hamdān Qarmat, a piece of information that is hard to reject.

<sup>12</sup> On this revolt and the imam’s departure from Salamiya, see Halm, *Reich des Mahdi*, 67–89, trans. 66–91, and Daftary, *Ismā‘ilis*, 132–35.

<sup>13</sup> From this point in the story of the imam’s travels, the main source is the *Sīrat Ja‘far al-Hājib*, a memoir dictated long afterwards by the manservant who accompanied him from Salamiya to Sijilmasa and finally to Raqqada. The Arabic text was published by W. Ivanow in the *Bulletin of the Faculty of Arts*, University of Egypt (Cairo, 1936), 107–33; Eng. trans. by Ivanow in *Ismaili Tradition Concerning the Rise of the Fātimids*, (London/Calcutta/Bombay, 1942), 184–223; French trans. by M. Canard, “L’autobiographie d’un chambellan du Mahdi ‘Obeidallâh le Fātimide,” *Hespéris*, 39 (1952), 279–330 (reprinted in *Miscellanea Orientalia*, London, 1973). See also Halm, *Reich des Mahdi*.

given both the crucial role of Abū ‘Ali and his prominence.<sup>14</sup> He is said, moreover, to have converted the brothers Abū ‘Abdallāh and Abu'l-'Abbās in Kūfa, and Abu'l-'Abbās obviously worked for him in Egypt later. That the head of the *da‘wa* – the famous Ḥamdān Qarmat – was stationed in Egypt by this time may well be significant. Does it indicate that a plan to take Egypt was already under contemplation even as far back as this? More likely, because the *da‘wa* had not achieved in Egypt numbers comparable to those in the Yemen and north Africa, Abū ‘Ali’s role was that of head gatekeeper, controlling messages and instructions coming and going from Salamiya to the Yemen and north Africa.

According to the testimony of the manservant Ja‘far, the party traveling with the imām thought they would all proceed from Egypt to the Yemen, where Ibn Hawshab and ‘Ali ibn al-Fadl had earlier subjugated most of the country. For reasons that are not clear, however, when the threat of ‘Abbasid capture loomed again, the imām announced instead that they would set off for the Maghreb. Firūz, reports Ja‘far, refused and, despite his position, abandoned the imām and went instead to the Yemen on his own. In contrast, Abū ‘Ali asked to accompany the imām but was told to remain at his post in Egypt until the situation in the west was resolved satisfactorily. Egypt obviously was a key element in the imām’s plan. Perhaps, significantly, although he was now regarded as a rebel, Firūz, who was said to have converted Ibn Hawshab originally, went to him in the Yemen and reported that the Yemeni *da‘wa* should be ready to march against Egypt when the imām returned there with the troops he was about to raise in north Africa.<sup>15</sup>

The imām went first to Alexandria where, disguised as a wealthy merchant, he joined a caravan headed west early in the summer of 905. Among those who accompanied him was Abu'l-'Abbās, the brother of Abū ‘Abdallāh. The baggage belonging to the party was obviously considerable and Sa‘id’s ability to avoid detection was unlikely in the long run. From Tripoli, as he approached the territory of the Aghlabid rulers of Qayrawan and central north Africa, he requested that Abu'l-'Abbās go on alone in order to determine whether the rest of the party could safely expect to pass through and ultimately reach the Kutāma region where a thriving Ismā‘īli

<sup>14</sup> Ibn Hawqal, *Sūrat al-ard*, ed. J. H. Kramers (Leiden, 1938), 96; French trans. by G. Wiet, *Configuration de la terre* (Beirut/Paris, 1964), 94. The son of Abū ‘Ali (Ḥamdān Qarmat), who was also the grandson of the same Firūz, later himself became the chief *dā‘ī* under al-Qā'im, al-Mansūr, and al-Mu‘izz. See the *Sīrat Ja‘far*, 114. The authenticity of Ibn Hawqal’s information about Ḥamdān Qarmat, though often rejected, has been recently accepted by Wilferd Madelung in an extremely interesting paper, “Ḥamdān Qarmat and the Dā‘ī Abū ‘Ali,” *Proceedings of the Seventeenth Congress of the UEAI (Union Européenne des Arabisants et Islamisants)*, (St Petersburg, 1997), 115–24.

<sup>15</sup> These details are reported in the *Sīrat Ja‘far*, 113–15, Eng. trans. 291–94, French trans. 194–97. Cf. Halm, *Reich des Mahdi*, 88–89, trans. 90–91.

community awaited them. By then, however, the activities of Abū 'Abdallāh were of considerable concern to the Aghlabids. He had forged out of the contentious Berber clans and tribes a solid army; his constant preaching of the Ismā'ili cause over more than a decade had steadily multiplied his following, which now constituted a formidable menace to the rulers in Qayrawān. Abu'l-'Abbās was immediately arrested on suspicion of complicity with Abū 'Abdallāh. Aghlabid authorities may also have had good reason to suspect that the two were related.

The imām's purpose was served, however, in that he was warned away. Nevertheless, with messages from the 'Abbāsids ordering his capture coming from the direction of Egypt, the imām had no choice but to continue westward. The only logical route, however, lay south of where he had hoped to go and the farther end of that path was some two months' travel away in the distant Maghribi town of Sijilmāsa.<sup>16</sup> Once there, moreover, he was not necessarily safe. Still, for the time being, he was compelled to remain in Sijilmāsa and hope for the best. He could easily keep pretending to be nothing more than a merchant, and his access to funds allowed him to buy the tolerance of the local ruler. In addition, he was never out of touch with his *da'wa*, including now, most importantly, Abū 'Abdallāh and the Kutāma.<sup>17</sup>

Aghlabid ability to govern depended ultimately on secure control over the towns of their region.<sup>18</sup> For them Qayrawān was a natural base since it was dominated by Arabs. The hinterland, however, fell progressively farther away from their immediate sway as the proportion of Arabs declined. Abū 'Abdallāh had established his refuge, his *dār al-hijra*, in an area where there were no cities and where an Aghlabid army could not easily reach him and his Ismā'ili flock. The Aghlabids were also slow to react. Not until 902 did they move against the Ismā'ilis, and their first attempts failed. Patiently, Abū 'Abdallāh built his small but growing kingdom of Ismā'ilis and waited before attacking major towns until he knew his Berber forces were likely to find success. It was not until 904 that he began to capture cities and, even then, he was hesitant to exploit his successes. By 908, the last government of Aghlabids, many members of which were then incompetent and morally bankrupt, had begun to destroy themselves. They had lost even the support of the Arabs who were increasingly impressed by Abū 'Abdallāh's movement and his personal dedication, abstinence, self-control and obvious piety. Finally, in March 909, the Aghlabid ruler packed up and absconded toward Egypt. Kutāma troops arrived at the government enclave of Raqqāda just

<sup>16</sup> An important town of pre-modern Islamic Morocco some 190 m/300 km south of Fez, now in ruins.

<sup>17</sup> Halm, *Reich des Mahdi*, 89–92, trans. 91–95.

<sup>18</sup> In addition to the other sources cited, see the study by F. Dachraoui, *Le Califat fatimide au Maghreb, 296–362/909–973: histoire, politique et institutions* (Tunis, 1981).

south of Qayrawān two days later and found that the local population had already had time to plunder what the Aghlabids had left behind.<sup>19</sup>

Abū ‘Abdallāh immediately assumed control; he was well received by those he had just defeated, many of whom hoped for an end to the injustice of the last Aghlabid, but some also were themselves already Shi‘ite and they anticipated profound changes from a fellow Shi‘ite. His most pressing problem, however, was to create a government which he could not easily do with only his Berber colleagues of the previous seventeen years. They, for their part, however, expected the fruits of victory in the form of plundered riches and prestigious appointments.

Another urgent task was the rescue of the imām from Sijilmāsa. After settling affairs in Qayrawān and Raqqāda, he wrote to his brother who was by then in Tripoli after having escaped Aghlabid detention. Abu'l-'Abbās came at once and together with the Berber leader Abū Zākī, who had been associated with the cause since the beginning, he was appointed co-regent for the interim while Abū ‘Abdallāh and his army marched west to retrieve the imam. Six months later the imām, now in full command, arrived in Raqqāda and assumed the caliphate under the name ‘Ubayallāh, al-Mahdī bi-Allāh on January 6, 910.<sup>20</sup>

The elevation of al-Mahdi brought to power an Ismā‘ili imām who had little reason to expect widespread acceptance from his non-Shi‘ite subjects. A significant portion of the Berbers were already Kharijite – implacable enemies of the Shi‘ites – and the majority of town dwelling Arabs belonged to the Maliki legal *madhab* which was equally hostile. Still, initially, the new regime found support not only from the converted Kutāmas but from others, especially from the non-Maliki Arabs, some of whom were Shi‘ite and some who were Sunnis but were Hanafi in their *madhab*. Eventually, however, religious difference rose to the surface and created enormous difficulties. The citizens of the new state had no choice but loyalty, reluctant or otherwise, or exile. Only a minority ever became Ismā‘ili or were known as Ismā‘ilis as the Kutāma were from the beginning. Rule by the Fātimids thus had two aspects: religious and political. One was the domain of the *da‘wa* acting on behalf of the imam; the other was more secular and involved a kind of recognition and obedience which never went deeper than the allegiance Muslims elsewhere pledged to the ‘Abbāsid caliphs. It is quite likely that from the first the overwhelming majority of those who lived

<sup>19</sup> Halm, *Reich des Mahdi*, 104–15, trans. 107–21, and M. Talbi, *L’Émirat Aghlabide (184–296/800–909)* (Paris, 1966).

<sup>20</sup> All non-Ismā‘ili sources give al-Mahdi’s name as ‘Ubayallāh whereas most Ismā‘ili works prefer ‘Abdallāh, as if the diminutive ‘Ubayd might be pejorative and demeaning. But the diminutive/endearing form “Husayn” hardly implies less status for Husayn ibn ‘Ali than for his brother Hasan.

under Fātimid government accepted their rulers with a similar if not the same sentiment as they had accorded previous political governors.

Within the total citizenry, however, the Ismā'īlis held a special position. For them, unlike the rest, the caliph was the single infallible representative on earth of God Himself. What the caliph decreed, therefore, was divine law, pure and simple; his understanding of all matters whether religious or otherwise was definitively true and valid without question or argument. Thus, while the establishment of the state brought about the rule of the righteous party in the political sense, continuing access to the imām as the divine guide in religious affairs gave the Fātimid state an additional dimension for its Ismā'īli inhabitants. The *da'wa* for them remained a constant requirement; and the *dā'i*s went on teaching Ismā'īlis within the state just as they also tried to expand the number of adherents by propagating their cause both at home and abroad.

In setting the course of his empire, al-Mahdi soon encountered a serious setback. Less than two years after achieving the finally victory over the Aghlabids and barely more than a year after his enthronement, Abū 'Abdallāh, his brother Abu'l-'Abbās, and a number of the earliest Kutāma converts, turned against him. The cause of their dissatisfaction is not clear, but al-Mahdi apparently could not act otherwise than order their execution. As in many situations that were to occur later, the Kutāma proved as difficult to keep in check when they chose to go their own way as they were valuable when loyal. Many of them apparently regarded Abū 'Abdallāh and his victory as theirs; they were disappointed with al-Mahdi and a style of rule largely foreign to their traditions and expectations.<sup>21</sup>

### *The first attempts to conquer Egypt.<sup>22</sup>*

The empire, however, was not to be limited within the narrow territory won by Abū 'Abdallāh and his Berbers, either politically or religiously. There is no doubt that al-Mahdi hoped soon to return eastward and to complete his empire by toppling the 'Abbāsids. Berber forces were sent in that direction almost immediately. By 913 the Fātimids had already fought and defeated rebels in Tripoli. Early in 914, they began a campaign to add the region of Barka and not long afterward troops moved from there into Egypt.<sup>23</sup> By late summer of the same year, an advance force of Berbers had taken Alexandria, and the main army under the personal command of Abu'l-Qāsim, the heir to

<sup>21</sup> Idrīs 'Imād al-Dīn, 'Uyūn al-akhbār, ed. al-Ya'lāwī as *Tārikh al-khulafā' al-fātīmiyyīn bi'l-maghrib: al-qism al-khāṣṣ min kitāb 'uyūn al-akhbār* (Beirut, 1985), 180–88.

<sup>22</sup> See especially Halm, *Reich des Mahdi*, 180–94, trans. 196–213.

<sup>23</sup> Tripoli is a major city in western Libya; Barka is some 708 m/1141 km by road east of it in the Cyrenaica region, also in Libya.

the imamate, reached the city in early November. Alexandria was immediately put under Shi‘ite rule.<sup>24</sup>

These victories so close to home awakened the ‘Abbāsids to the threat posed by the Fātimids who were not, it was now obvious, merely renegade dissidents in the far away province of Ifriqiyya, but were rebels with a grand agenda that aimed at the overthrow of the Sunnī caliphate. With Abu'l-Qāsim and his army stationed first in Giza opposite Fuṣṭāt and later in the Fayyūm, the ‘Abbāsid ruler began sending reinforcements to Egypt. Ultimately, the Fātimids ran out of provisions before they could force a crossing to the east bank of the Nile. They did not fare well in pitched battles either. Finally, Abu'l-Qāsim retreated to Alexandria. There he maintained resolutely his intent to take the fight to the ‘Abbāsids. His attitude is clearly expressed both in a poem he sent back to his father and in the sermons he delivered in the mosque of Alexandria, the text of one of which survives.<sup>25</sup> As the ‘Abbāsids poured funds and personnel into Egypt, however, he could not hold out; by May of 915 he had returned to Raqqāda.<sup>26</sup>

The dream of eastern conquest was not over, however. Almost at once preparations were resumed, although it was not until a few years later that Abu'l-Qāsim and his army again reached Alexandria, where he spent most of 919 as reinforcements followed him into Egypt, an important contingent of which was the Fātimid fleet of some eighty ships. The ‘Abbāsids were already on the alert, having observed these developments carefully. They countered with a fleet of their own sent from Cilicia far to the north. In March 920 the two squadrons fought a sea battle near Abukir which ended in a disaster for the Fātimids. That summer Abu'l-Qāsim marched, as he had before, past Giza into upper Egypt where he assumed the posture of ruler, collecting taxes and controlling commerce. For a while a stalemate ensued; neither side possessed sufficient resources to dislodge the other. Instead they engaged in an exchange of rhetorical propaganda.<sup>27</sup> On being offered ‘Abbāsid recognition of Fātimid hegemony over the former Aghlabid domains, Abu'l-Qāsim replied with a denunciation of ‘Abbāsid legitimacy. He made his objective quite clear: the replacement of the ‘Abbāsids themselves. Neither north Africa nor Egypt would satisfy him if he were

<sup>24</sup> Idris, ‘Uyūn, 194–5.

<sup>25</sup> Halm, *Reich des Mahdi*, 185–87, trans. 203–05, and Idris, ‘Uyūn, 197–98 (poem) and 198–202 (sermon). This material from the ‘Uyūn al-akhbār was published previously by S. M. Stern in his “Al-Mahdi’s Reign According to the ‘Uyūn al-Akhbār,” *Studies in Early Ismā‘īlism* (Jerusalem, 1983, 96–145), 115–21.

<sup>26</sup> Idris, ‘Uyūn, 196–209.

<sup>27</sup> On the details of this incident as well as the whole character of Fātimid propaganda against their various opponents including the ‘Abbāsids, see the article by M. Canard, “L’impérialisme des Fātimides et leur propagande,” *Annales de l’Institut d’Etudes Orientales de la Faculté des Lettres d’Alger*, 6 (1942–47), 156–93 (reprinted in *Miscellanea Orientalia*, no. II).

deprived of the ultimate goal of destroying the godless usurpers in Baghdad.<sup>28</sup>

The Fātimid position in Egypt was precarious, however. In the spring of 921, the 'Abbāsid fleet recaptured Alexandria and their troops managed to blockade the Fayyūm, in effect trapping Abu'l-Qāsim. By traveling north through the desert route along the Wādī Naṭrūn, he escaped, but with huge losses. Once back at the court of his father, the damage done to Fātimid morale and its grand purpose was concealed by friendly propaganda. The jihād – the sacred struggle – and the *da'wa* must be pursued regardless of the impossibility of immediate success; a just cause was a duty imposed by God and victory would come when and if He should will it.<sup>29</sup>

The two expeditions by the heir apparent against Egypt were not the only attempts of this kind by the Fātimids. On several other occasions, even during the reign of al-Mahdī, their troops entered Egyptian territory although with few or no consequences. Early in the reign of al-Mahdī's son Abu'l-Qāsim, who had adopted the throne name al-Qā'im bi-Amr Allāh in continuation of the messianic theme of the initial Fātimid rise to power, a large army again marched to Alexandria. This time al-Qā'im was trying to gain from internal Egyptian confusion and infighting. A group of Maghribi soldiers there had seized Alexandria and invited him to send troops. Although the Fātimids managed to capture Alexandria yet again, they could not hold it. Their army was soon defeated by Ikhshidid forces.<sup>30</sup>

Despite this evidence of Fātimid preoccupation with Egypt, it would be wrong to ignore their persistent attempts to expand westward into the farthest Maghrib or northward from Sicily, which they had inherited from the Aghlabids and which served as a base of jihād against Christian Italy and Byzantium. Nor did they neglect to extend their *da'wa* in the same directions. Missionaries were sent, for example, to Spain to spread Shi'ism there; the former *dā'i* of Egypt, Abū 'Ali (Hamdān Qarmat), who had been allowed to come to north Africa after the victory, was later dispatched to Constantinople. Spreading Ismā'ilism among the citizenry of the Byzantine capital was, admittedly, an unlikely adventure, and he subsequently spent five years in detention there prior to freedom and a return to Qayrawān.<sup>31</sup> *Dā'is* loyal to the Fātimids were also active throughout all of the eastern Islamic territories. Fātimid interest in Egypt must be regarded therefore as

<sup>28</sup> Idris, 'Uyūn, 206–7; Canard, "L'impérialisme," 172–73.

<sup>29</sup> Idris, 'Uyūn, 208; Halm, *Reich des Mahdi*, 193, trans. 212–13.

<sup>30</sup> Ibn al-Athir, 'Ali ibn Muhammad, *al-Kāmil fil-ta'rīkh*, ed. C. J. Tornberg (Beirut, 1965–67), viii, 285; Halm, *Reich des Mahdi*, 194, trans. 213.

<sup>31</sup> Idris, 'Uyūn, 237–38. This information appears with his obituary notice; he died in 321/933. He had been in Constantinople when the crisis with Abū 'Abdallāh al-Shī'i and his brother occurred. It is material that was not included for some reason in the earlier editions of Idris's text.

but one stage in their planned domination of Islam; for them control of the Nile was crucial but only as a preparation for this larger goal.

As it turned out, in the short term that all-consuming goal was soon put aside in response to a mortal threat from a new revolt among the Berbers. In a way not unlike Abū ‘Abdallāh on behalf the Ismā‘īlī Shi‘ites against the Aghlabids, a Kharijite rebel named Abū Yazīd Makhlad ibn Kaydād inspired the Zanātā Berbers and fashioned out of them a formidable army which, beginning in 943, he used all but to destroy the Fātimid state. Known as the Man on the Donkey (*Şāhib al-Himār*) in standard sources, or simply as al-Dajjāl in Fātimid writings, Abū Yazīd rampaged through most of central Tunisia, took Qayrawān and Raqqāda, and ultimately reached the walls of al-Mahdiyya the coastal capital city of the Fātimids at the time.<sup>32</sup> Although first al-Qā’im and then his son and successor al-Manṣūr after him were safely ensconced within al-Mahdiyya, their North African state crumbled before the onslaught of Abū Yazid. From 944 to 947, the Fātimids were completely preoccupied with reversing the damage and eradicating the Dajjāl and his influence. Only upon his final victory, in fact, did the new imām announce his own succession to the imamate, even though his father had died months before; appropriately, in honor of the occasion, he adopted the throne name al-Manṣūr, the Victor. The short reign of al-Manṣūr, however, though victorious, did not allow time for further expansion of the empire. That fell to his son, al-Mu‘izz li-Din Allāh, who succeeded in March of 953.

### *Al-Mu‘izz’s plan for Egypt*

The experience of the first three Fātimids constituted an inheritance well understood by al-Mu‘izz who had personally witnessed most of it. Their aspirations were his own but he had the benefit of their mistakes and failures. His own approach was careful and cautious; his preparations were protracted and meticulously planned. Basically, his policy consisted of three distinct initiatives. One involved a new interpretation of Ismā‘īlī doctrine especially as it pertained to the application of law. A second was the creation of a professional core of administrators who would not bring with them the conflicts often carried over from previous tribal loyalties. This was particularly important for the army. Finally, he made an attempt to win back many of the eastern Ismā‘īlis who had been Qarmatian and who had refused earlier to recognize Fātimid suzerainty.

Shi‘ite law was already practiced in Fātimid domains prior to the

<sup>32</sup> Al-Mahdiyya, the capital city of the Fātimids from its founding until the building of al-Manṣūriyya, still exists on the coast. It lies approximately 120 m/200 km southeast of Tūnis and 60m/100 km east of Qayrawān.

accession of al-Mu'izz, but it had never been systematically formulated by the Ismā'īlis.<sup>33</sup> In Ismā'īli theory the imām is the sole authority for all law and for all religious understanding, and each newly succeeding imam automatically replaces the former. Only by acknowledging and following the word of the living imām can an Ismā'īli be assured of salvation. Written documents by their very nature record the past and not the living present; to remain current, they require constant oral re-interpretation. 'Abbāsid propaganda against the Ismā'īlis claimed, in fact, that they (here read, perhaps, Qarmatians) believed that for every literal wording of the law, for example, there is an esoteric interpretation that is its true meaning and that once a believer knows the secret inner reality behind the surface of the scripture or the law, the exterior no longer applies. Accordingly, the Ismā'īlis are free of legal obligations since they need follow only the hidden message of the scripture or the law. In part this assessment is accurate. Sunnī authorities, however, exaggerated its implications; almost no Ismā'īli author ever advocated abandoning the law but instead resolutely insisted that both the letter and the meaning of the law must be followed strictly. Islamic law must be observed in every detail; this form of the teaching was repeated by all Ismā'īli authorities for whom there now exists direct and unbiased evidence.

However, anti-Ismā'īli propaganda had hurt the Fātimid cause and al-Mu'izz realized that an Ismā'īli state would require a written and publicly accessible constitution, if only to put to rest fears of an impending irreligious lawlessness connected to a Fātimid assumption of power. To that end he commissioned the chief legal expert among the Ismā'īlis in North Africa, the famous Qādī al-Nu'mān, to assemble and rationalize a complete corpus of Ismā'īli religious law. The Ismā'īli community in particular, and by direct implication the Fātimid state in general, would thereafter have a recognized written body of legal material and thus a constitution; and they would become a *madhhab* like the Malikis and Hanafis among the Sunnīs or the Twelvers among the non-Ismā'īli Shī'is.<sup>34</sup>

A secondary feature of this same initiative had Qādī al-Nu'mān and other writers begin to record the history of the Fātimid imams as if that history were exemplary and was itself a basis for what to expect from Ismā'īli imams in the future. All this was done as a matter of public policy ostensibly for an Ismā'īli audience but with a view toward those citizens of the Islamic

<sup>33</sup> On the background, see Madelung's study "The Sources of Ismā'īli Law," in *JNES*, 35 (1976), 29–40.

<sup>34</sup> Qādī al-Nu'mān's legal compilations began with a massive collection of material called *Kitāb al-idāh*, which is almost entirely lost now, but he also produced several summaries and handbooks as well, most notably the *Da'a'im al-islām* (ed. by A. A. A. Fyzee, 2 vols., Cairo, 1963 and 1960) which subsequently became the standard text in Fātimid law. On his role in the entourage of al-Mu'izz, see Halm, *Reich des Mahdi*, 302–04, trans. 340–42.

community who were not. While most of the literature produced by the *da‘wa* was guarded in secrecy, the works of Qādi al-Nu‘mān, except for a rare few, could and would be read by non-Ismā‘ilis as al-Mu‘izz had intended. Those who did find statements that were to reassure them that a Fātimid government was as solidly Islamic and orthodox as any other, certainly more so than that of the rival ‘Abbāsids.

Al-Mu‘izz also recognized that the strength of the Fātimid appeal had been seriously weakened by the long standing defection of eastern Qarmatian Ismā‘ilis. Had the Fātimid state been able to count on the support of Iraqi and Bahraynī Ismā‘ilis, the two together, acting in concert, might well have destroyed the ‘Abbāsids long before. Even had the first Fātimid invasion of Egypt been supported by a sizable force from the Yemen, as al-Mahdi evidently hoped it would, the outcome would have been different. By the time of al-Mu‘izz, however, the Yemeni *da‘wa* was no longer as vigorous as it had once been and some other portions of the *da‘wa* abroad had been weakened considerably. Nevertheless, the Qarmatians of the east, in contrast, remained formidable.

This old division in the Ismā‘ili legacy was not easily mended despite the willingness of al-Mu‘izz to compromise. Still, by judicious adjustments in the public teaching offered by his *da‘wa*, he succeeded in part. The messiahship of Muhammad ibn Ismā‘il was again admitted, for example, and the heady intellectual speculations of thinkers like the Neoplatonist *dā‘i* Abū Ya‘qūb al-Sijistānī and his predecessors, were now recognized as valid. Gradually, the dissidents rallied to his side, most notably al-Sijistānī himself.<sup>35</sup>

The more obdurate of the Qarmatians, however, refused to accommodate al-Mu‘izz. They were unrepentant. Moreover, their successful predatory raids against ‘Abbāsid Iraq and the Hijāz gave them virtual hegemony over a large part of Arabia, with complete control of the eastern pilgrimage route. Many cities and governing entities paid them tribute even as they also despised them. When Abū Tāhir al-Jannābī seized Mecca in January of 930 and removed the Black Stone from the Ka‘ba, this massive sacrilege – though hardly that in the eyes of the Qarmatians – constituted a disaster for the Ismā‘ilis at large. The term *Qarmaṭi* was by then commonly pejorative; it now became doubly so. Even after the incident in which a false messiah fooled Qarmatian leadership and made a mockery of their doctrine, they could still threaten their enemies and force them to pay tribute. And the

<sup>35</sup> Daftary, *Ismā‘ilis*, 176–80, and Halm, *Reich des Mahdi*, 257–65, 335–37, trans. 288–97, 378–80. On the thought of al-Sijistānī, see Paul E. Walker, *Early Philosophical Shi‘ism: the Ismā‘ili Neoplatonism of Abū Ya‘qūb al-Sijistānī* (Cambridge, 1993); Walker, *The Wellsprings of Wisdom* (Salt Lake City, 1994); and Walker, *Abū Ya‘qūb al-Sijistānī: Intellectual Missionary* (London, 1996).

Fātimids, although sharing a common Ismā‘ili heritage, were no exception; the Qarmatians were their enemies as well.

In the administration of the state, the Fātimids learned quickly that, although the Kutāma had put them in power and were the bedrock of their military, the Berbers – either as individuals or as a group – seldom succeeded in breaking away completely from their tribal past. There were frequent examples of friction between Berber commanders or governors and the non-Berber populations of occupied towns and cities. Some of the Kutāma, moreover, proved far too independent and uncontrollable. Early on the caliphs began to rely instead, not only on the experienced administrators of the regime they had supplanted, but on a growing cadre of purchased slaves, some of whom they subsequently freed and thereafter employed as they would other mercenaries and salaried retainers. Even though freed, the status of a former slave preserved a close sense of dependence and loyalty that freeborn Arab blood or Berber ancestry seemed often to prevent. The most famous of these slaves was Jawhar, who was originally of slavic extraction. After several masters, Jawhar finally was given to the Caliph al-Mansūr who set him free and for whom he worked thereafter as a secretary (a *kātib*). Under al-Mu‘izz, Jawhar acquired even greater responsibility as the commander of military expeditions, first to the farthest Maghreb which he subdued for the Fātimids all the way to the Atlantic ocean.<sup>36</sup> Al-Mu‘izz’s purpose was best served by such able planners who were sensible and methodical rather than impetuous and unpredictable.

There can be no doubt, given the history of previous Fātimid interest, that al-Mu‘izz intended the conquest of Egypt from early in his reign, his expansion to the west and his complicated dealings with the Byzantines notwithstanding. In fact a Byzantine ambassador who had come to Tunisia and who witnessed there a show of Fātimid military might was told that he would next see al-Mu‘izz in Egypt. (And when he actually arrived later in Egypt, al-Mu‘izz predicted that their next meeting would be in Baghdād.)<sup>37</sup>

With a caution that was not characteristic of his immediate predecessors, al-Mu‘izz organized his approaching conquest of Egypt as if it were not only sure to succeed but would ultimately result in a reconfiguration of the empire itself. His propaganda apparatus leaned heavily on the need to bring strong leadership to the jihād against the Byzantines in northern Syria. This was a theme designed to appeal in the east and was something the ‘Abbāsids, by implication, were not doing. Agents of the *da‘wa* were numerous in Fustāt, including among them the director of the local *da‘wa*, a wealthy

<sup>36</sup> There is a biography of Jawhar in al-Maqrīzī’s massive *al-Muqaffā al-kabir*, ed. M. al-Yālawī, 8 vols. (Beirut, 1991), iii, #1102, 83–111. See also H. Monès, “Djawhar al-Sikilli,” in the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, and Halm, *Reich des Mahdi*, 302, trans.

<sup>37</sup> Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil*, viii, 663.

merchant named Abū Ja‘far Aḥmad ibn Naṣr, who had befriended and perhaps also bribed many Egyptian officials, among them the wazīr, the chief judge and the heads of the local ‘Alid families.<sup>38</sup> As economic conditions along the Nile deteriorated because of unusually low water for several years in succession in the 960s, many Egyptians wondered if the Fātimids would not be preferable to the distant and increasingly impotent ‘Abbāsids who were represented in Egypt by surrogate military commanders. Moreover, the Qarmatians now began to dominate Syria, making Baghdad even less important.

By 966, Jawhar had been ordered to commence recruiting an army. Throughout 968, al-Mu‘izz collected special taxes and amassed matériel of all kinds. His accumulation of monies alone was enormous and stunning: one report says he brought together 24,000,000 dinars for the purpose. The road to Egypt was also prepared meticulously, with new wells dug at regular intervals along the route. In early February 969, Jawhar and his army left Raqqāda. Al-Mu‘izz had made sure that everyone knew the importance of this venture and equally the rank of its chief commander. The governors of towns en route were to dismount for the freedman Jawhar and kiss his hand.

Upon his arrival in Egypt, there was little or no sign of resistance. Jawhar quickly assumed control over the west bank of the Nile all the way into the Fayyūm and waited for a reaction from the Egyptians. The wazīr, the heads of both Hasanid and Husaynid *ashrāf*, the chief *Qādi*, and other notables soon came to see him in company with the local director of the Ismā‘ili *da‘wa*. Surrender and occupation seemed a foregone matter. Jawhar grandly issued a proclamation of safe conduct (*amāna*) and arranged a treaty of capitulation in which he spoke of the need to recommence the jihād, secure the pilgrimage routes, end illegal taxes, restore mosques, and return to the true *sunna* of the prophet. Some unanticipated resistance by Ikhshīdid military units interrupted the expected bloodless transition, but this minor disturbance proved shortlived. By July, Jawhar’s forces were peacefully crossing the pontoon bridge from Giza into Fustāt and setting up camp to the north of the mosque of Ibn Ṭūlūn on the site of what was later to become the city of Cairo. On July 9, Jawhar himself led prayers in the Old Mosque of ‘Amr in Fustāt and the preacher, dressed now in Fātimid white in place of ‘Abbāsid black, recited the *khuṭba* for the first time in Egypt in the name of al-Mu‘izz li-Din Allāh.<sup>39</sup>

Although Jawhar’s conquest had been largely peaceful, the task of

<sup>38</sup> Bianquis, “La Prise du pouvoir par les fatimides en Egypte (357–363/968–974),” *Annales Islamologiques*, 11 (1972), 48–108; 62–63 provides the details and sources for the activities of this agent. See also Halm, *Reich des Mahdi*, 362–64, trans. 409–10 and Daftary, *Ismā‘ilis*, 171–72.

<sup>39</sup> On the Fātimid takeover of Egypt, in general, see Halm, *Reich des Mahdi*, 361–72, trans. 408–20, and Bianquis, “La Prise du pouvoir,” 48–108.

governing Egypt in the name of his Shi'ite master was not quite as simple. There is almost no doubt that the Fātimids had planned in advance for the general initiatives undertaken by Jawhar, such as the building of a separate capital as a residential enclave for the troops and much of the government. Also, as they had done sixty years earlier in north Africa, they re-employed the administration of the previous regime in the bureaucracy and in the judiciary. Ibn al-Furāt, the former wazīr, was confirmed in place as were the chief *qādī* and the *khaṭib* of the Old Mosque in Fusṭāṭ. Jawhar also tried whenever possible to reenlist the officers of the Ikhshīdid and Kāfūrid armies. Still, the acquisition of Egypt was, for the Fātimids, only a step – albeit a major step – towards Baghdād; their goal remained universal in respect to the Islamic world and Egypt was thus, for them, one more province of a wider empire. Equally, they hoped to convert to Shi'ism as much of the population as possible, since only in that way could they gain the true loyalty of their new subjects and engage them in the larger common cause, but, as in north Africa, this task would be difficult if not impossible.

Jawhar's efforts to stabilize the Egyptian economy, then in a shambles, and to restore prosperity were immeasurably aided by preserving administrative continuity with the older regime along with an aggressive military campaign against both rebels and brigands who had previously added to the suffering and general chaos. Once he had assured himself of his position, however, the sizable Fātimid army of imported Berber troops and commanders were quickly apt to become a burden both in terms of provisioning and unruly interaction with the local populations. In line with the original aim of further expansion, they were dispatched fairly soon in the direction of Syria.

Under the command of a Berber chieftain, Ja'far ibn Falāḥ, they marched swiftly and successfully through Palestine to Damascus, which they seized for the Fātimids prior to raiding northward. Whether the Fātimids were ultimately headed toward Baghdād or merely conducting the promised jihād against the Byzantine Christians, or both, northern Syria had to be taken first. By 971 Ibn Falāḥ had come within range of the great city of Antioch. A Fātimid army that far north constituted a major penetration into the Byzantine sphere of influence but this initial raid collapsed almost at once.<sup>40</sup> Fātimid attempts to conqueror and control Syria failed then as they would countless times again.<sup>41</sup>

Ibn Falāḥ not only suffered a defeat by the Byzantines in northern Syria but had to face an enraged Qarmatian foe shortly thereafter in front of Damascus, where he was killed and his army soundly beaten. The Qarmatians, having no allegiance to their fellow Ismā'īlis, had gathered a broad

<sup>40</sup> Walker, "A Byzantine Victory Over the Fātimids at Alexandretta (971)," *Byzantium*, 42 (1972), 431–40.

<sup>41</sup> Bianquis, *Damas et la Syrie sous la domination fatimide (359–468/969–1076)*, 2 vols., (Damascus, 1986, 1989).

coalition of tribal forces out of the east and added to them renegade former soldiers from Ikhshīdid territories. This coalition now invaded Egypt, rampaging throughout the eastern Delta, and finally confronted Jawhar at his new encampment near what is now the site of the modern city of Heliopolis. The luck of the Fātimid commander held, however, and in late December 971, he ultimately forced the Qarmatians and their allies back and out of Egypt.

Already of great benefit to Jawhar was the increasingly fortified enclave he was building along the Nile north of the mosque of Ibn Tūlūn. It was, in fact, rapidly becoming a city and was then called al-Manṣūriyya in direct imitation of the city in Tunisia where the imām resided, named for its builder the Caliph al-Manṣūr, father of al-Mu‘izz. The plan for the new capital was brought with Jawhar, and like its namesake it was given a northern gate called al-Futūh, a southern gate called al-Zawila, and a central congregational mosque named al-Azhar.<sup>42</sup>

Separation of the Shi‘ite army of occupation from the crowded Sunnī city of Fustāt also proved useful. Jawhar, like most of the Fātimids, was fully conscious of differences between the two religious parties. Egypt was then strongly Sunnī despite an observable respect for the members of the *Ahl al-Bayt* and their corporations of *ashrāf*-nobility. The heads of both Hasanid and Husaynid families readily acquiesced in the rule of Fātimid imams whom they apparently accepted as blood relatives and family, but they showed little or no sign of adopting Ismā‘ili Shi‘ism. Minimal steps were made by Jawhar to introduce Shi‘ite ritual and those with care and suitable caution. The Shi‘ite formula in the call to prayer was used first in the mosque of Ibn Tūlūn (March 970) and only later in the Old Mosque of ‘Amr in Fustāt.<sup>43</sup> The Ismā‘ili method of determining the end of Ramadān caused difficulties in the earliest instance because the Shi‘ites at al-Manṣūriyya broke the fast one day ahead of the Sunnīs in Fustāt. Later, however, more Shi‘ite practices entered Egypt, such as celebration of the event of Ghadīr Khumm and the elaborate emotional mourning of ‘Āshūrā’. If and when the Sunnīs were separated physically from the Shi‘ites, the friction was relatively small; if the regime tried to force the issue publicly, troubles and violence always ensued.

In Egypt many loyal subjects of the Fātimids accepted them as valid caliphs with full and legitimate rights to lead the Muslim community, but not in the absolute sense demanded in the Shi‘ite theory of the imamate. Rather, the Fātimids were rulers like the ‘Abbāsids and, in this view, the claims of each were more or less comparable. True Ismā‘ilis, called the

<sup>42</sup> On al-Manṣūriyya as the capital of the north African Fātimids, see Halm, *Reich des Mahdi*, 305–07, trans. 342–46. On its connection to the plan for Cairo, see 307 and 368, trans. 346 and 415–16.

<sup>43</sup> Ibn al-Athir, *al-Kāmil*, VIII, 590.

“saints” (*awliyā’*), belonged to a more narrow spectrum of the population. They were, in their own view, the “believers” (*mu’mīnūn*) as opposed to the uninitiated masses who were simply “muslims” (*muslīmūn*). Membership in this Ismā‘ili inner circle implied total devotion to the imam and to his orders and directives. Most Ismā‘ilis also attended regular sessions of prayer and instruction which gradually assumed greater importance, eventually becoming in Egypt the *majlis al-hikma* or *majlis al-da‘wa*. Those who attended paid a fee called the *najwā* (“fee for a confidential discourse”) or the *fitra* (contributions paid on the feast days), depending on the occasion.

Still, it is impossible to determine accurately what percentage of the population was actually Ismā‘ili, although, in Egypt as a whole, the numbers tended to remain small. There may have been an exception to this observation in the earliest phase of Fātimid rule. The chroniclers report waves of enthusiasm for the Ismā‘ili religious appeal during al-‘Aziz’s and the first portion of al-Hākim’s reigns. On several occasions, attendance at the *da‘wa*’s *majlis* session produced such large crowds that, twice in this early period, men died in the crush. From about the middle of al-Hākim’s period, however, the numbers apparently began to decline markedly.<sup>44</sup> Thus Shi‘ism remained the faith of a minority although the *da‘wa* and its program of appeals and conversion continued its activity to the end of the Fātimid period. The most important institution of Ismā‘ili education, the *majlis al-hikma*, still under the supervision of the chief *dā‘i* of the empire, ceased in Egypt only when finally abolished by Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn in 1171, 200 years later.

Jawhar’s ability to defeat the Qarmatians and generally to regulate the affairs of Egypt, coupled with the construction of a palace in the new capital city, convinced the Caliph al-Mu‘izz that the moment had come finally to transfer the court. Like the conquest itself, this move was meticulously prepared. Revolts by the Zanāta Berbers in the central Maghrib caused serious difficulties at first and the Hamdūnids of Masila,<sup>45</sup> once quite loyal to the Fātimids, went over to the Umayyads. Zirī ibn Manād and other commanders sent after the rebels failed; Zirī himself was killed by them. Only when Buluggin<sup>46</sup> the son of Zirī had won full revenge did quiet return to the western territories. It was Buluggin, moreover, to whom the responsibility for the western domains of the Fātimid fell when al-Mu‘izz departed.<sup>47</sup> Sicily was to remain under its long-time amīr from the family of al-Hasan

<sup>44</sup> Walker, “The Ismā‘ili Da‘wa in the Reign of the Fātimid Caliph al-Hākim,” *JARCE* 30 (1993), 160–82.

<sup>45</sup> M’sila (in current orthography) is located some 75m/125km southwest of Setif in Algeria. On its connection with the Fātimids, see F. Dachraoui, “Masila,” *EJ2*.

<sup>46</sup> There is a short notice on Buluggin (in Arabic Buluqqin or sometimes Bulukkin) by H. R. Idris, *EJ2*.

<sup>47</sup> Daftary, *Ismā‘ilis*, 170–71; Halm, *Reich des Mahdi*, 368–69, 370, trans. 416–17, 418.

al-Kalbi.<sup>48</sup> As with the previous departure of Jawhar, large sums were collected and made ready for transport, along with great quantities of valuables and, most symbolic of the finality of this move, the coffins of the deceased Fātimid imāms. In November 972, the party set out, some by sea but most by land. They proceeded slowly and along the way several important figures died, including Ustādh Jawdhar, whose memoirs, the *Sīrat Ustādh Jawdhar*, are a vital source of information, and the famous Andalusian poet Ibn Hāni'.<sup>49</sup> In late May, al-Mu‘izz reached Alexandria where he was met by a party of distinguished notables. Traversing the Delta en route to the capital, he was greeted by additional groups who came to him from the Egyptian capital, all of whom extended him the highest honors and recognition. Finally, in June 973, the imām entered the new al-Manṣūriyya which now became the City of al-Mu‘izz’s Victory, al-Qāhirah al-Mu‘izziyya, or more simply, Cairo.<sup>50</sup>

### *Cairo as the center of the Da‘wa*

In one sense the arrival of the imam, which transformed the new city of Cairo into the seat of an empire, was itself an event that signalled the ultimate achievement of the Fātimids, especially of al-Mu‘izz but also of his immediate predecessors, all of whom envisioned just this goal. However, in another sense, although for al-Mu‘izz, who died only two and a half years later, it was the culmination of a long period of personal commitment, for the Ismā‘ilis and the Shi‘ites, Cairo was still not Baghdad and the hated ‘Abbāsid usurpers yet held power there. As they embellished their new headquarters, the Ismā‘ilis were reaffirming its central importance as the residence of the living imam both politically and religiously. But the *da‘wa* would not cease, neither within the empire nor outside; if anything the triumph in Egypt encouraged expectations of total victory and spurred on the *da‘is* in distant lands to add their own individual contributions to the common vision of a total Shi‘ite victory.

Away from the safety of direct Fātimid protection, the *da‘wa* continued to operate in secret as it had previously. The Egyptian Fātimid state grew as a

<sup>48</sup> Daftary, *Ismā‘ilis*, 156–7.

<sup>49</sup> Halm, *Reich des Mahdi*, 370–71, trans. 419. Ibn Hāni' was murdered under mysterious circumstance en route. On him see Muhammad al-Ya'lawi, *Ibn Hāni' al-Maghribi al-Andalusi* (Beirut, 1985) and the articles by F. Dachraoui, "Ibn Hāni' al-Andalusi," *E12* and by Yalaoui (al-Ya'lawi), "Ibn Hāni', poète Shi'ite et chantre des Fātimides au Maghreb," *Les Africains*, VI (Paris, 1977) 99–125. Jawdhar died of old age. His *Sīra* is a rich source of documents and other information about the North African period, particularly for the reign of al-Mu‘izz. The Arabic text was published by M. K. Husayn and M. ‘Abd al-Hādi Sha‘ira (Cairo, 1954); French trans. by M. Canard, *Vie de l'ustādh Jaudhar* (Algiers, 1958). See also Canard, "Djawdhar," *E12*.

<sup>50</sup> Halm, *Reich des Mahdi*, 371–72, trans. 419–20, and Daftary, *Ismā‘ilis*, 175–76.

menace in the eyes of the 'Abbāsids, and the danger to Ismā'īlī agents and partisans in areas under Sunnī control increased accordingly. Still, we know that the agents of Fātīmid Ismā'īlism existed nearly everywhere, many now in close and direct contact with Cairo.

The non-Fātīmid Qarmatian dissidents remained uncooperative, however, and threatened Egypt yet again. Their attack on Egypt during 974 was serious enough. With allies among the Syrian Bedouin tribes and with disaffected members of the Egyptian *ashrāf* under the leadership of Akhū Muhsin, brother of the loyal Husaynid *sharif*, they advanced against the Fātīmids both in the Delta and near Akhmīm in Upper Egypt. With difficulty al-Mu'izz eventually defeated both contingents.<sup>51</sup> Only then did the Qarmatians all but disappear. Their decline occurred fairly rapidly and by the end of the tenth century they existed as no more than a small localized power. For a while they were even said to have recognized the Fātīmids, although with little change in their doctrine, and they never accepted the Fātīmid version of the imāmate.<sup>52</sup>

Many eastern Ismā'īlis did, however, and those who acceded to the Fātīmid imamate now regarded Cairo as a destination of pilgrimage and as the center of Ismā'īlī doctrine and teaching. *Dā'i*s traveled to Egypt from distant regions, often carrying with them the fiscal contributions of far-off Ismā'īlī communities, and they returned homeward with instructions and other orders from headquarters. Sizable groups of loyal supporters continued to exist in the Yemen, India and in parts of Arabia, as well as in areas of Iraq, Syria, and Iran.

Occasionally, the *dā'i*s who visited Cairo were already or were later to become especially noteworthy in their own right. As an example the great philosophically minded theologian, Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Kirmānī, who normally taught in Baghdād and Baṣra, was brought to Cairo late in the reign of al-Ḥākim. The chief of the *da'wa*, Khatkin al-Dayf, had requested his help and al-Kirmānī obliged, bringing to Egypt and to the *da'wa* in Cairo much needed intellectual sophistication and rigor.<sup>53</sup> Al-Ḥākim's imamate had produced an unwanted and uncontrollable enthusiasm among a number of the *dā'i*s, especially some from the east who arrived in Cairo with strange ideas about the divine nature of the imām. Al-Ḥākim himself had adopted an inexplicable style and an ascetic behavior quite at odds with that of either himself in his earlier years or that of any of his predecessors. As these

<sup>51</sup> Bianquis, "Prise du pouvoir," 98–102.

<sup>52</sup> On the end of the Qarmatians, see Madelung, "Karmaṭī," *EI2*; and Daftary, *Ismā'īlīs*, 220–22, 183–84, and 175–76.

<sup>53</sup> On al-Kirmānī's role in Cairo, see J. van Ess, "Biobibliographische Notizen zur islamischen Theologie," *WO*, 9 (1977/78), 255–61, and *Chiliastische Erwartungen und die Versuchung der Göttlichkeit. Der Khalif al-Ḥākim (386–411)* (Heidelberg, 1977). 2 Abhandlung; and Walker, "The Ismā'īlī Da'wa," 160–82.

enthusiasts began to ascribe to him ever more elaborate powers, including eventually outright divinity, al-Hākim either refused to take notice of them or possibly deliberately and knowingly tolerated their exaggerations. The *da‘wa* was, however, horrified; these preachers had after all once been *dā‘is* themselves but had now gone seriously astray. Their arguments about the divinity of the imām were, moreover, quite familiar among the Shi‘a who had seen doctrines like this advocated by extremists (*ghulāt*) on many earlier occasions. Al-Kirmānī, on behalf of the central *da‘wa*, wrote several tracts against them refuting vigorously their absurd claims and they were soon forced underground, partly through his efforts and partly as a result of mob action and military force. In its general outlines but with later doctrinal modifications and additions, the original movement of those who tried to recognize the divinity of al-Hākim survived as the Druze. They failed or were suppressed in Egypt quickly but not long afterward found a home among some rural communities of the Lebanese mountains.<sup>54</sup>

Al-Kirmānī had returned to his home base in Iraq even before the Druze affair ended and was already there, in fact, prior to the disappearance of al-Hākim in 1021. Characteristically, we know almost nothing else about his life and career except for this one visit to Cairo. Were it not for a surviving body of writings that are, however, impressive for their contribution both to philosophy and to theology, his role in defending the imamate of al-Hākim might be the only evidence of his career in the *da‘wa*.<sup>55</sup>

The two main instigators of the trouble that had spawned the Druze, Hamza ibn ‘Ali and Muhammad ibn Ismā‘il al-Darazī, were, like al-Kirmānī, *dā‘is* from the east, the one Persian, the other Turkish. Many others like them traveled to Cairo over the course of the dynasty, attracted there both by Ismā‘ili devotions and by its Shi‘ism. Thirty years after al-Kirmānī’s visit, two of the most famous, Nāṣir-i Khusraw and Mu’ayyad fil-Dīn al-Shīrāzī, arrived in Cairo almost at the same moment, although both had come separately from different areas of Iran. Both men subsequently wrote personal accounts of their travels and adventures, both became poets, and both authored major books of Ismā‘ili doctrine. Their respective careers in the Ismā‘ili *da‘wa*, which resembled each other sharply in many respects, were, however, quite distinct in the long run. Yet both were distinguished representatives of the *da‘wa* and they well illustrate how it performed its larger mission in the middle of the eleventh century when they were most active.

<sup>54</sup> On the Druze origins in Fātimid Cairo, see D. Bryer, “The Origins of the Druze Religion,” *Der Islam*, 52 (1975), 47–83, 239–62, and 53 (1976), 5–27; Daftary, *Ismā‘ilis*, 195–200.

<sup>55</sup> On the philosophical contribution of al-Kirmānī, see now D. De Smet, *La Quiétude de l’Intellect: Néoplatonisme et gnose ismaélienne dans l’œuvre de Hamid ad-Din al-Kirmānī (Xe/Xle s.)* (Leuven, 1995).

Al-Shirāzī came from an Ismā‘ili family and his father was previously a *dā‘ī*. Nāṣir’s entry into the *da‘wa* is a matter of speculation and it is not certain exactly when he became Ismā‘ili. Both men had grown dissatisfied or disaffected with conditions where they then lived – al-Shirāzī had fallen into disfavor because of his activities and influence on behalf of the *da‘wa* with the Buyid Amir – and they set off for Cairo at about the same time, arriving there in 1046 and 1047 respectively. Each of them was then in his forties. At the time the head of the *da‘wa* in Cairo was the great-grandson of Qādi al-Nu‘mān, a man of minimal distinction and hardly the intellectual match of either of these two younger Persian immigrants. Al-Shirāzī already prided himself on his command of Arabic style which he employed with skill both to promote himself and to embarrass his detractors. Nāṣir had made his journey, so he says in his own account, purely as a pilgrimage to Mecca. Significantly, that pilgrimage took him also to Cairo for an extended stay in between visits to the holy cities.<sup>56</sup>

From this point the careers of al-Shirāzī and Nāṣir diverge. Nāṣir-i Khusraw returned to Khurāsān, where his activities on behalf of the Ismā‘ili *da‘wa* brought him endless trials and tribulations and eventually forced his exile to the remote back-country of Yumgān. Still, he wrote a full *diwān* of Persian poetry, which though often containing allusions to his Ismā‘ili leanings, earned him a deserved literary reputation in itself. In addition he managed to write a number of important works on Ismā‘ili doctrine which are themselves noteworthy, in part because Nāṣir composed them in Persian rather than Arabic. In contrast, al-Shirāzī was sent as a special agent to Syria and Iraq where he was to support a major uprising against the ‘Abbāsids. He then returned to Cairo and held various posts in the *da‘wa* until ultimately becoming the *dā‘ī al-du‘āt* or chief *dā‘ī* of the empire, a position he retained for twenty years with a few minor interruptions. His writings included, besides an autobiography and a *diwān* of Arabic poetry, a massive collection of some 800 lectures that he, as head of the *da‘wa*, had given in the weekly sessions of the *majlis al-hikma* in Cairo.<sup>57</sup>

Except for their literary attainments, the career pattern of these two *dā‘īs* was repeated by many others. Two more like them are particularly impor-

<sup>56</sup> Daftary, *Ismā‘ilis*, 213–18.

<sup>57</sup> On the writings of both men, particularly their Ismā‘ili works, see Ismail Poonawala, *Biobibliography of Ismā‘ili Literature* (Malibu, 1977). The major titles by Nāṣir are his *Diwan*, of which there are numerous editions and English translations of some individual poems, the *Safar-nāma*, ed. with French translation, Charles Schefer, as *Sefer nameh: relation du voyage de Nassiri Khosrau* (Paris, 1881), with several later editions; English translation, W. M. Thackston Jr., *Nāṣer-e Khosrau’s Book of Travels* (Albany, NY, 1986), the *Zād al-musāfirin*, *Wajh al-dīn*, *Shish Faṣl*, *Khwān al-ikhwān*, and *Jāmi‘al-hikmatayn*. Mu’ayyad’s *Dīwān* and *Sira* were edited and published by M. Kāmil Husayn in Cairo, 1949. Portions of his *al-Majālis al-Mu’ayyadiyya* were published by M. Ghaliib in Beirut, vols. I and III, 1974–84.

tant: Ḥasan ibn al-Ṣabbāḥ from Iran and Lamak ibn Malik al-Ḥammādī from the Yemen. Lamak was the chief Ismā‘ili *Qādi* of the Yemen and a *dā‘ī* when he was sent to Cairo by the Ismā‘ili ruler and himself chief *dā‘ī*, ‘Alī ibn Muhammad al-Ṣulayḥī. He arrived in Egypt in 454/1062 and remained there five years.<sup>58</sup> Ḥasan ibn al-Ṣabbāḥ had been active in the Iranian *da‘wa* under ‘Abd al-Malik ibn ‘Aṭṭāsh, who likewise dispatched his subordinate to Egypt where he was to spend three years (1078–1081). Both these cases are especially relevant because the future direction of the international *da‘wa* eventually depended on these same agents at a major juncture in the history of Ismā‘ilism. In the aftermath of the Nizārī-Musta‘li schism, it was Ḥasan who engineered the secession of the eastern, especially Iranian, *da‘wa*, and it was Lamak, by contrast, who played a key role in preserving Yemeni loyalty to Cairo and to the imamate of al-Musta‘li.<sup>59</sup>

### *Eastern successes*

The purpose of these *dā‘īs* and the *da‘wa* for which they worked was not primarily to promote Ismā‘ili loyalty in Egypt, of course, but rather to spread it abroad. Although *dā‘īs* continued to preach and convert Muslims to Ismā‘ilism inside Fātimid territory, the *da‘wa* scored its major successes elsewhere. The old goal of supplanting the ‘Abbāsid caliphate never disappeared but, as the possibility of sending an army from Cairo to Baghdad faded, the *da‘wa* had to fulfill a similar task. Syria receded more and more from the grasp of Cairo. As it did, the *da‘wa* became the only hope. Agents expended great effort and funds to convert and enlist allies near the ‘Abbāsid capital. On one occasion in 401/1010–11, for example, the ‘Uqaylid Amir Qārwash ibn al-Muqallad, who controlled the Iraqi cities of Mawṣil and Kūfa, among others, proclaimed his allegiance to the Fātimids. This particular success of the *da‘wa*, although spectacular and certainly a glaring affront to the ‘Abbāsids, was quite temporary. The ‘Abbāsids, moreover, retaliated not only by convincing Qārwash to renounce his Fātimid allegiance in short order, but in the following year, by assembling in Baghdād a distinguished group of Twelver Shi‘ite authorities and members of the Ahl al-Bayt who, under government prodding, promptly issued a stinging denunciation of Fātimid genealogy which, according to this manifesto, was entirely bogus: the Fātimids were not descendants of ‘Ali and Fātimah at all. This was a theme the ‘Abbāsids returned to frequently; another similar proclamation was issued from Baghdād in 444/1052.

<sup>58</sup> Daftary, “Ḥasan-i Ṣabbāḥ and the Origins of the Nizārī Ismā‘ili Movement,” in Daftary *Mediaeval Ismā‘ili History*, 181–204; Daftary, *Ismā‘ilis*, 209–10; Abbas Hamdani, “The Dā‘ī Ḥātim ibn Ibrāhim al-Ḥāmidī (d. 596 H./1199 AD) and his Book *Tubṣat al-Qulūb*,” *Oriens*, 23–24 (1970–71), 258–300.

<sup>59</sup> Daftary, *Ismā‘ilis*, 284–5.

It should be noted that the Fātimids in a similar way had often circulated derogatory rejections of ‘Abbasid “genealogy,” in which they did not, of course, deny descent from the prophet’s uncle ‘Abbās but pointed out, instead, that such lineage was practically worthless in term of religious merit and legitimacy. ‘Abbās had simply been of little or no consequence, certainly none that counted.

Fātimid influence outside their political domain, however, depended on the success of the *da’wa* against the counter-propaganda of their various enemies of which the Baghdād Manifesto of 402/1011–12 was but one example. It also fell victim to the vagaries of local conflicts, some religious and others political, military or economic. In 440/1048, for example, the Zirid Amir of north Africa, al-Mu’izz ibn Bādis, succumbed to various pressures exerted internally by the Maliki *fugahā’* of his realm, and he renounced the Fātimids by declaring for the ‘Abbāsids. Although the actions in that year did not result in an irreversible break, they signalled a shift in sentiment and symbolically indicated the end of Fātimid influence in north Africa.<sup>60</sup> In the Yemen, the *da’wa* fared better. After Ibn Hawshab, the original mission languished for a long time but revived dramatically in the middle of the eleventh century under the Sulayhids who came to dominate Yemen as a whole and who remained a major force there until 532/1138.<sup>61</sup>

Still, given that the old dream of the Fātimids was to take Baghdād, the most impressive success of its *da’wa* must surely be the victory of the Amīr al-Basāsīrī, who captured the ‘Abbāsid capital in 450/1058. Al-Basāsīrī and those who joined his cause were, moreover, the beneficiaries of direct Fātimid support and encouragement. Mu’ayyad fi'l-Dīn al-Shīrāzī was, in fact, the agent plenipotentiary responsible for orchestrating an elaborate scheme to thwart a Seljuk takeover in Iraq and Syria, as well as to ensure Shi’ite dominance in Baghdad. The ardently Sunnī Seljuk Sultan Tughril, for his part, had fully intended to eradicate Shi’ite influence and march all the way to Egypt to bring Fātimid rule to an end. Although al-Basāsīrī was himself Turkish in origin, he evidently had Shi’i leanings, as did a number of the Arab tribal leaders in Iraq who aided him. Al-Mu’ayyad carried large sums of money and great numbers of weapons from Cairo and donated them to the effort. In this case the *da’wa* was backed heavily and directly by the government in Egypt, at least in the initial phase of this undertaking.<sup>62</sup>

At a critical moment, the Seljuks were weakened temporarily by internal quarrels. Although Tughril had already seized Baghdād, he found it necessary to leave in order to put down a rebellion by his own brother who, like

<sup>60</sup> Daftary, *Ismā‘ilis*, 211–12.

<sup>61</sup> Daftary, *Ismā‘ilis*, 208–11.

<sup>62</sup> al-Maqrizī, *Itti‘āz al-hunafā’ bi-akhbār al-a‘imma al-fātimiyyin al-khulafā’*, I, ed. J. al-Shayyāl (Cairo, 1967); II–III, ed. M. Hilmī M. Ahmad (Cairo, 1971, 1973), II, 232–237, 251–258; M. Canard, “al-Basāsīrī,” *EI2*.

other amīrs in this complex conflict between Seljuks and Fātimids, toyed with the emissaries of Cairo to gain whatever advantage and support they might offer him. Several times various cities of Iraq and Syria announced allegiance to Cairo, only to fall away almost immediately. The crowning moment, however, came when al-Basāsīrī entered Baghdād in late December 1058. Shortly thereafter, in January 1059, he attacked and ransacked the palace of the ‘Abbāsid caliph. Subsequent to al-Basāsīrī’s takeover, the *khuṭba* was offered in the name of al-Mustanṣir the Fātimid imam for almost a year. Baghdād belonged to the Fātimids, at least nominally, and the pleasure of the imām al-Mustanṣir at this victory was dampened only by al-Basāsīrī’s failure to seize and then transport the ‘Abbāsid Caliph al-Qā’im to Cairo.

By then all parties must have begun to re-assess the situation. The Fātimids had expended vast resources to back a doubtful venture for which they soon found reason to express regret; al-Basāsīrī’s main interests were local and, when Tughril was free again to concentrate his might against him, the amīr fled Baghdād and was killed shortly afterward. The Seljuks and the Sunnīs came out of the affair stronger than before and the Shī‘is, in general, lost ground to them everywhere except in Egypt. Two of the most formidable enemies of the Ismā‘īlis, the wazīr Nizām al-Mulk and the theologian al-Ghazzālī, rose to prominence in the wake of this Seljuk restoration of Sunnī power.<sup>63</sup>

The rise of the Seljuks did not, however, diminish the resistance of the eastern Ismā‘īlis, whose *da‘wa* began to take the lead in opposition to the widely perceived oppression of the Sunnī Turks against the indigenous Persians. The same Hasan ibn al-Ṣabbāḥ who had visited Cairo in the late 1070s now assumed a major role by going over to open revolt against the Seljuks. In September 1090, he seized the fortress of Alamūt in northern Iran and began to piece together an Ismā‘īlī state out of disparate and often isolated communities and mountain castles. His was a political territory largely without either a center or a land connection between its parts. At the time of his revolt, Hasan, as he had been since his conversion to the Ismā‘īlī faith, was loyal to the imām in Cairo, al-Mustanṣir. He never wavered in that allegiance and, for a period, the Fātimids through him controlled, in theory, a string of fortresses and other Ismā‘īlī holdings throughout Iran. They would likewise bear some remote credit for Hasan’s successful assassination of the fervently anti-Ismā‘īlī wazīr Nizām al-Mulk in October of 1092.<sup>64</sup>

<sup>63</sup> Later medieval Egyptian historians observed about this temporary triumph of al-Basāsīrī that “This incident was the last success of the Fātimid dynasty.” Ibn Muyassar, *Akhbār miṣr*, ed. A. F. Sayyid (Cairo, 1981) 21; al-Maqrizi, *Itti‘āz*, II, 257.

<sup>64</sup> M. G. S. Hodgson, *The Order of Assassins* (The Hague, 1955); B. Lewis, *The Assassins: A Radical Sect in Islam* (New York, 1968); Daftary, *Ismā‘īlīs*, 335–71.

### *Schisms and survival*

The revival of a strong *da'wa* in the east, however, did not bear the fruit it promised when it began. At the death of al-Mustanṣir after a reign of over sixty years, several of his sons claimed the imāmate, and the Ismā'īlis both in Egypt and abroad now suffered a severe succession crisis. In Cairo the local strong man al-Afdal, son and heir of Badr al-Jamālī, supported the youngest of al-Mustanṣir's many sons who assumed the imamate with the name al-Musta'li. Of the other sons who felt they possessed a claim, Nizār, the oldest, immediately countered by declaring his own imāmate and going into open revolt against the Cairene establishment which was, however, firmly in the hands of al-Afdal.

This dispute, the first real succession crisis in the Fātimid dynasty, resulted in a dramatic breakup of the *da'wa* outside Egypt. Internally, al-Afdal put down the supporters of Nizār, had Nizār himself killed, and forced the Nizāriyya, as the partisans of his imamate came to be called, including Nizār's descendants, to flee the country. In Iran, Iraq and parts of Syria where Ḥasan ibn al-Ṣabbāḥ directed the *da'wa*, the outcome was quite different. Hasan had quickly declared for Nizār and once on that course refused to change. He would not accept a *da'wa* on behalf of al-Musta'li, whom he regarded thereafter as a usurper. He and his immediate successors continued to act in the name of Nizār or of Nizār's descendants. There were, in fact, a number of Nizār's sons as well as brothers who escaped Egypt and some of them rose in rebellion in later years.<sup>65</sup>

Hasan's rejection of al-Musta'li and his line was not merely a sign of eastern independence. The Nizāris retained an interest in Egypt and pursued there a campaign for revenge at least until the death of Hasan himself in 1124. Nevertheless, the eastern Nizāri Ismā'īli state, which now became entirely separated from the Cairo caliphate, was itself coterminous with the Seljuk empire. To emphasize the newness of their role, Hasan described the doctrines he advocated as the New *Da'wa* (*al-da'wa al-jadida*) and, with the exceptions of the Ismā'īlis who followed him in Syria, most if not all began to use Persian rather than Arabic and they progressively lost contact with much of the older Ismā'īli literary heritage.

The imāmate in Cairo, which lost a sizable portion of its world-wide following because of the Nizāri–Musta'li schism, held on to the important Ismā'īli communities of the Yemen and India which accepted the succession that had been decreed by the authorities in Egypt. In contrast to the distant provinces of Iran and Iraq, the Yemen had been carefully cultivated by Cairo in the latter period of al-Mustanṣir, after Badr al-Jamālī assumed control over the *da'wa*. In the aftermath of al-Basāsīrī and the rise of the Seljuks, the

<sup>65</sup> Walker, "Succession to Rule in the Shi'ite Caliphate," *JARCE*, 32 (1995), 239–64, 254–6.

Fātimids, or at least those who ran their affairs in Egypt, focused their attention on the Yemen and India while allowing the Iranian *da‘wa* to function more and more on its own. That is evident from a number of governmental decrees, now preserved in the collection called *al-Sijillat al-Mustansiriyya*,<sup>66</sup> dispatched to the Yemen after Badr al-Jamāli had taken power. It is also plainly borne out by the loyalty of the Yemeni *da‘wa* to al-Musta‘lī and his son al-Āmir rather than to Nizār or his descendants.

When al-Āmir was murdered, however, this connection between Cairo and the Yemen was finally broken. What lay behind this latter rupture may not be more than the accident of not having a visible and properly designated claimant to the imamate. Al-Āmir had announced the succession of his only male child, who happened to be born only months prior to his own untimely death. The infant, called al-Tayyib, was immediately recognized in the Yemen and accepted as the new imam. The death of al-Āmir confirmed this fact; there could be no other result. In Cairo matters proceeded differently; al-Tayyib was ignored or forgotten. Eventually, a cousin of al-Āmir was proclaimed imam with the name al-Hāfiẓ and his partisans became thereafter the Hāfiẓiyya.<sup>67</sup> They comprised the main support of the last Fātimids. Hāfiẓi Ismā‘ilis, based primarily in Egypt and parts of Syria with some pockets in the Yemen, were thus pitted now against Tayyibi Ismā‘ilis who were mainly Yemeni with a secondary population in India.

Although Hāfiẓi Ismā‘ilism continued actively in Egypt until the end of the Fātimid dynasty and slightly beyond, it eventually died out, leaving almost no record of its doctrinal position except in regard to the arguments for its version of the imamate. Nizāri Ismā‘ilism, in contrast, flourished from its inception under Hasan ibn al-Šabbāh until it was virtually eradicated by the Mongols in 1256. It was never totally wiped out, however, and thus survived, its later adherents becoming the modern Ismā‘ilis of Iran, India, and Syria who recognize the Aga Khans as their imams. Tayyibi Ismā‘ilis are represented now by groups in the Yemen and in India where they are called Bohras. Unlike the Nizāri branch which broke with its Arabic past, the Tayyibis, moreover, preserved an Arabic literary tradition that runs continuously from modern times back to the earliest years of the Fātimids. In the post-Fātimid period, Tayyibi scholars in the Yemen were especially active collectors and preservers of older Ismā‘ili works of all kinds. Nearly

<sup>66</sup> Edited by ‘Abd al-Mun‘im Mājid (Cairo, 1954).

<sup>67</sup> The best and most complete account of Hāfiẓi Ismā‘ilism is Daftary, *Ismā‘ilis*, 264–69, 273–84, but see also Samuel M. Stern, “The Succession to the Fātimid Imam al-Āmir, the Claims of the later Fātimids to the Imamate, and the Rise of Tayyibi Ismā‘ilism,” *Oriens*, 4 (1951), 193–255; and Paula Sanders, “Claiming the Past: Ghadir Khumm and the Rise of Hāfiẓi Historiography in Late Fātimid Egypt,” *SI*, fasc. 75 (1992), 81–104.

all of the Ismā‘īlī sources for Fātimid history or doctrines that now exist are due to this effort; almost without exception they owe their preservation to the concern of Yemeni Tayyibis for their own Fātimid past. Particularly for the Tayyibis, who prefer the designation *Fātimī* (i.e. Fātimid) for themselves rather than *Ismā‘īlī* but also for the Nizāris, Fātimid Egypt remains the land where the imāms they recognize lived and died and it continues therefore to constitute sacred territory until today.

## The Fātimid state, 969–1171

PAULA A. SANDERS



### *Fātimid political history*

At the heart of the Fātimid state lay the imamate, which challenged both the political hegemony and the religious authority of the Sunni ‘Abbasid caliphate. The Fātimids were a sect of Shi‘is, that is, one of several groups who argued that ‘Ali ibn Abī Tālib should have succeeded the Prophet Muhammad as head of the Islamic community of believers. These partisans of ‘Ali (*shi‘a*, hence the term *Shi‘i*) also eventually claimed that the headship of the Islamic community should rest with the descendants of ‘Ali and his wife Fātima, the daughter of the Prophet. They also believed that the descendants of ‘Ali and Fātima had inherited special authority to interpret the Qur‘an and religious law and belief. Disputes among different groups of Shi‘is often centered, therefore, around genealogy. The Fātimids traced their own descent through Ismā‘il, one of the early Shi‘i imams, and thus we call them Ismā‘ili.

When the Fātimids came to Egypt, they had already worked out their genealogical claims in detail, moved from being a secret missionary group to an openly declared caliphate, and founded a state in Ifriqiyya (modern-day Tunisia).<sup>1</sup> The turning-point for the dynasty came with the accession of the fourth Fātimid imām-caliph, al-Mu‘izz li-dīn Allāh in 342/953. In 358/969, he succeeded in conquering Egypt after three unsuccessful attempts by his predecessors. The relatively bloodless campaign was led by his general Jawhar, who founded a new capital city, Cairo, just two miles north of the original Arab capital Fustāt. Several years later, al-Mu‘izz moved his court from north Africa to Cairo, and Egypt remained the center of the Fātimid empire until the end of the dynasty in 1171. Al-Mu‘izz also carried out a successful program of propaganda in the holy cities of Mecca and Medina, where local rulers recognized Fātimid rule until the eleventh century.

<sup>1</sup> For these developments, see chapter 5 above.

The reign of al-Mu'izz's successor al-'Aziz (ruled 365–86/975–96) was dominated by his ambition to control southern and central Syria, and in this period the Fātimid empire reached its greatest extent. Egypt flourished under al-'Aziz, who introduced a series of military reforms. He fixed the rates of pay for his army and court personnel, and he brought Turkish slave troops into the army. These Turkish troops rose to prominence at the expense of the Berbers who had brought the Fātimids to power. They were often at odds with both the Berbers and new regiments of black slave troops, beginning a history of factional strife that would continue to plague the Fātimid army.

Al-'Aziz was succeeded by al-Hākim (ruled 386–411/996–1020), perhaps the best-known Fātimid caliph. His reign has been the object of much study, and modern scholars have puzzled over his often erratic behavior. In a state that had been marked by its tolerance of Jews, Christians, and Sunnis, al-Hākim introduced numerous repressive measures against those groups. However, he often repealed those measures as suddenly as he announced them. His eccentricities were a source of encouragement to a small group who believed him to be an incarnation of divinity. This group, the Druze, believed that when he disappeared in 411/1020, he had gone into concealment and would return at a later time. It appears, however, that al-Hākim was murdered by his own sister, Sitt al-Mulk, not only because of the threats his unpredictable behavior posed to the dynasty, but also because of his plan to make a cousin his successor, a move that would have violated the fundamental Ismā'īlī principle of father-to-son succession. Sitt al-Mulk also did away with the troublesome cousin and ensured the accession of al-Zāhir (ruled 411–27/1020–35) to the throne, averting what could have become an early schism, and acted as regent. Al-Zāhir's undistinguished reign was marred by famine and internal unrest as well as by a series of foreign relations failures, most notably with the Byzantines. Nonetheless, in the early years of the long reign of al-Mustansîr (ruled 427–87/1035–94), the Fātimid state was prosperous and its rulers had access to considerable financial resources.

The Persian traveler Nasir-i Khusrau reported, in the aftermath of a visit to Egypt in 1047–48, that the caliphs owned all the shops in Cairo – numbering 20,000 (an inflated figure, to be sure), and collected rent of between 2 and 10 *dinars* each month from each one – the caravanserais and bath-houses in Cairo, and an additional 8,000 revenue-producing buildings in Cairo and Fustât. However, starting in the 1060s, a series of low Niles resulted in intermittent famine for nearly twenty years and compelled the caliph to appeal to the Byzantine emperor for grain. In addition, the factional fighting of rival Turkish and black slave soldiers escalated into open warfare, inaugurating a period called by medieval chroniclers *al-shidda* (the calamity). The Caliph al-Mustansîr was forced to sell the dynasty's immense treasures of costumes, jewelry, and ceremonial arms in order to

placate the army. But the situation continued to deteriorate, and in 465/  
1073, al-Mustanṣir asked the governor of Acre, Badr al-Jamālī, for help.

Badr, a freed slave of Armenian origin, arrived in Egypt in the winter of  
1073 and restored order in a matter of months. With a private army  
composed largely of Armenian soldiers, he crushed the Turkish troops in the  
capital. Drought and factional fighting in the provinces had prevented the  
cultivation of agricultural land for several years; there was famine; parts of  
Cairo had been decimated by looting; poverty was widespread, affecting  
even the Fātimid family. Badr crushed the fighting factions in the provinces,  
cultivated the support of the merchant class in pursuing a policy of law and  
order, and suspended taxes for three years in order to allow the peasants  
time to begin cultivating their land again. His policies succeeded in restoring  
order and creating the conditions which, once the drought was over, allowed  
the economic recovery of the country.

Badr's power, unlike that of previous wazirs, did not depend upon the  
direct patronage of the caliph; he had an independent base of power, his  
army, and his title *amir al-juyūsh* (commander of the armies) was no mere  
honorific. Badr's arrival inaugurated a century of rule by military wazirs  
with their own armies that persisted until the end of the Fātimid state. He  
assumed leadership of the civil bureaucracy, the military, and the propa-  
ganda mission. After Badr, Fātimid wazirs were almost exclusively military  
officers, and they were the real rulers of the state.

Badr died in 487/1094, only a few months before the Caliph al-Mustanṣir,  
and was succeeded in the wazirate by his son al-Afdal. Al-Afdal installed the  
younger son of al-Mustanṣir as the Caliph al-Musta'li (ruled 487–95/  
1094–1101). The first five Egyptian Fātimids (al-Mu'izz, al-'Azīz, al-Hākim,  
al-Zāhir, al-Mustanṣir) were eldest sons, and the Fātimid family itself  
appeared to have adhered to the succession of the eldest son. The Nizāris, or  
supporters of the dispossessed elder son Nizār, never accepted the legitimacy  
of al-Musta'li and his line, and they worked actively, but unsuccessfully, to  
overthrow the Fātimid government. The short reign of al-Musta'li was  
dominated by the Nizāri threat and by al-Afdal's relatively successful  
attempts to recapture lost territories. In 495/1101, al-Afdal raised a five-  
year-old son of al-Musta'li to the throne. This caliph, al-Āmir (r. 495–524/  
1101–30), remained under the thumb of al-Afdal until the latter's death in  
515/1121.

After al-Afdal's death, al-Āmir was able to reassert some of the power of  
the caliph, and he ruled directly after imprisoning his wazir al-Ma'mūn  
al-Baṭā'ihi in 519/1125. But al-Āmir's rule was challenged constantly by the  
Nizāris, as well as by marauding Berber tribes. In 516/1125 he issued a  
proclamation that asserted the legitimacy of al-Musta'li's line, but in 524/  
1130 he was assassinated by the Nizāris. At his death, al-Āmir is said to  
have left an infant son, al-Tayyib. A cousin of the late caliph, 'Abd al-Majid,

was named as regent by factions of the army. However, the son of al-Afdal, Abū 'Ali Kutayfāt, overthrew the government, confiscated the palace treasures, and imprisoned 'Abd al-Majīd. He also deposed the Fātimid line in favor of the expected imam of the Twelver Shi'is. Abū 'Ali Kutayfāt remained in power for a little over a year and was murdered in 526/1131. At that time, 'Abd al-Majīd was restored as regent; but the infant al-Tayyib had disappeared, and there was no apparent heir. 'Abd al-Majīd thus proclaimed himself the imam with the title al-Hāfiẓ (ruled 524–44/1130–49). His authority was contested both by the Nizāris, who opposed the Musta'lian line altogether, and by the Ṭayyibis, who maintained that al-Tayyib was in concealment in the Yemen.

The last three Fātimid caliphs, al-Zāfir (ruled 544–49/1149–54), al-Fā'iz (ruled 549–55/1154–60) and al-'Ādīd (ruled 555–66/1160–71) came from the Hāfiẓi line. All were children, and the last few years of Fātimid rule were essentially a contest for power between generals and wazirs. The last wazir of the Fātimid caliphs was Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn, best known to modern readers as the heroic figure who successfully recaptured Jerusalem from the crusaders. But he also dealt the final blow to the Fātimid caliphate. In 566/1171, Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn had the name of the 'Abbāsid caliph read in the mosques of Cairo for the first time in over 200 years. A few days later, the last Fātimid caliph died.

### *The military and its role in the Fātimid state*

Over the course of some 200 years of rule, the Fātimid military underwent dramatic changes in its structure and composition, and these changes were accompanied by equally important changes in the army's role in Fātimid society. The central position of the military was not restricted to its role in expanding the realm or defending its territories. By the late Fātimid period, the state itself had become militarized so that the army was involved in almost every aspect of Fātimid government and administration. Thus, understanding the military and its role is fundamental to understanding the character of the Fātimid state.

The Fātimids had come to power in north Africa and conquered Egypt largely on the strength and loyalty of a Berber tribal army. One Berber tribe, the Kutāma, were so central to the army that their affairs were administered by a special Office of the Kutāma, and they received many privileges, including exemption from taxation. Their loyalty was an enormous boon to the Fātimids, but they exhibited one distinct shortcoming: they were not skilled in archery. Therefore, when the Berber Fātimid army began to expand into Syria and encountered Turkish troops who were skilled archers, they suffered defeat. The need for archers was clear, particularly since Turks dominated the armies of the 'Abbāsid caliphs, whose lands the Fātimids coveted. So the second Fātimid caliph, al-'Azīz billāh (ruled 365–86/

975–96), introduced Turkish troops into his army. At the same time, the *bujra* (barracks) system for training slave soldiers, first introduced by the ‘Abbāsids in the late ninth century, was incorporated into the Fātimid military structure. In the barracks, the new Turkish military slaves learned archery. Following a pattern that was already familiar in the Islamic world, these Turkish troops soon rose to prominence, playing a central role in defining the character of the Fātimid state.<sup>2</sup>

The diversification of the army continued under Caliph al-Hākim, who increased the numbers of black slaves in his army (*‘abid al-shirā’*). By the middle of the eleventh century, the Fātimid army included several different ethnic groups with martial specialties: the Berbers were cavalry fighting with lances, the blacks were heavy infantry, the Daylams (a group originating in the area southwest of the Caspian Sea) were light infantry using bows and javelins, and the Turks were mounted archers.<sup>3</sup>

These changes in the composition of the army were accompanied by shifting alliances. The Kutāma Berbers, the original mainstay of the army, felt sufficiently threatened by the growing power of the Turks to insist that one of their own, Ibn ‘Ammār, become the chief of the *dīwāns* upon the death of al-‘Aziz. The blatant favoritism that Ibn ‘Ammār showed to the Kutāma provoked the Turks to depose him and install their own candidate in office. A few years later, in 1020, the Turks and the Kutāma formed a coalition against the black troops, who rioted to protest against the favors granted to the other groups. The black troops pillaged and burned Fustāt, where both Kutāma and Turkish soldiers had put down roots, even marrying into the local population. In this period, the Fātimid army was a multi-ethnic force, plagued by competition and factionalism that was kept in check by maintaining a delicate balance among its different elements, and between the army as a whole and the dynasty.

By the 1060s, however, this balance had begun to fail, and factional fighting culminated in a civil war between the black and Turkish troops. Desperate and unable to restore order, the Caliph al-Mustanṣir summoned the governor of Acre, Badr al-Jamālī, who arrived in Egypt with his own army in 1073. Badr’s army was composed of several different ethnic groups, including Armenians. In his restructuring of the Fātimid army, Armenian Christians, serving in both infantry and cavalry units, came to predominate. These Armenian soldiers had no local ties and, therefore, their loyalty could be assured by their dependence upon Badr’s patronage.<sup>4</sup> Badr also brought in large numbers of military slaves, whose loyalty could also be assured

<sup>2</sup> For these developments, see Yaacov Lev, *State and Society in Fatimid Egypt* (Leiden, 1991), 81–92; William Hamblin, “The Fātimid Army during the Early Crusades” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Michigan, 1984), 32–36.

<sup>3</sup> Lev, *State and Society*, 89; Hamblin, “The Fatimid Army,” 147–54.

<sup>4</sup> Hamblin, “The Fatimid Army,” 19–27.

owing to their dependence upon him. These troops formed several regiments, the most important of which, the Juyūhiyya (so called after Badr's title *amīr al-juyūsh*), continued to play a significant role in the Fātimid army until they were suppressed by Ṣalāḥ al-Din in 1171.

From the time of Badr until the end of the dynasty, the Fātimid army remained a multi-ethnic force organized into a number of large regiments, each with its own quarter in Cairo, and held together by a complex system of patronage. Badr's son and successor, al-Afdal ibn Amīr al-Juyūsh, maintained and elaborated the system his father established. But he faced an even more serious challenge than his father, namely the Crusaders. After suffering a crushing defeat in Palestine in 1099 and a series of minor humiliations, al-Afdal established the Hujariyya, a regiment comprised of the freeborn sons of Fātimid soldiers who were trained in the barracks (*bujra*, pl. *bujar*) as mounted archers. In spite of the resources devoted to these troops, al-Afdal's military reforms had little effect on the success of the Fātimid army, and the lost Syrian territories were not recovered from the Franks definitively until the 1160s.

Throughout the twelfth century the army provided a power base for a series of military wazirs who were the effective rulers of the state. Only one Fātimid caliph, al-Āmir, was able to reassert any measure of political and military authority, and then only briefly. The last thirty years of Fātimid rule were marked by nearly continuous factional fighting among the regiments, by competition between caliphs and wazirs for the loyalty of powerful regiments whose support was fundamental to the exercise of power, and by the manipulation of military factional politics through both patronage and purging.

The commanders themselves appear to have become increasingly independent, particularly in the provinces, owing in large part to the growth of the *iqtā'* system, which can generally be described as allocating the revenues from designated lands to military personnel. While *iqtā'* grants had certainly been used to supplement salaries for the army throughout the previous century, they began in the twelfth century to replace cash payments from the central government. The financial strain of this unwieldy army on a weakened economy and the priority given to the interests of the army by the succession of military wazirs resulted in the significant loss of control by the central government over *iqtā'*s, and by the late Fātimid period, many soldiers exercised direct control over their *iqtā'*s. This situation had important implications for Fātimid governance, for the reliance on *iqtā'*, which increasingly replaced cash payment from the central government, also undermined the elaborate system of patronage that was fundamental to maintaining order.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Lev, *State and Society*, 124–30.

The military came to play a significant role also in the broader administration of the state. From the time of Badr al-Jamālī, the Fātimid wazirs were men who had risen to power through the military. The late Fātimid administrative hierarchy placed the wazir at the head of both the civilian and the military bureaucracies. The wazir, who was a “man of the sword,” wielded much broader powers and prerogatives within even the civilian administration than earlier wazirs, who had been men “of the pen.” He crossed the boundaries between civil, religious, and military authority. The wazir in the late Fātimid period, for example, was addressed by the title “judge of judges” (*qādī al-qudāt*), although he exercised no judicial functions. He occupied a crucial position as the person responsible for executing the caliph’s commands, and he often spoke for the caliph. Theoretically, his authority derived from the caliph, but his ability to act in the political arena was not a function of his investiture by the caliph; rather, it was constituted in large part by the loyalty he commanded from his own troops and from the various factions of the army that supported him. This, of course, often placed the wazir at odds with the caliph. But the interests of the caliph and the wazir did not conflict entirely. Both shared an interest in preventing a breakdown of order among the factionalized army, and both knew that the loyalties of the troops fluctuated according to their perception of their self-interest. The twelfth-century Fātimid army was diverse in its loyalties as well as in its ethnic and racial composition. It contained the remnants of personal troops of various commanders, wazirs, and caliphs (or their descendants). These groups were powerful constituents and rivals, and much of the work of the late Fātimid administrative structure was devoted to providing resources to keep them in check.

### *Fātimid administration and administrative culture*

Like other contemporary Islamic dynasties, the Fātimids created a sizable bureaucracy to organize and carry out the administration of their empire. The Fātimid state apparatus was divided into a number of departments called *diwāns*. These *diwāns* handled the fiscal, military, diplomatic and administrative affairs of the Fātimid state. The sources for their history, however, are highly disjointed, making it difficult to trace their development systematically. One of the obstacles to analyzing these *diwāns* is that the names of the departments changed over time, and we cannot be certain to what extent the nominal changes reflected functional changes as well. Nonetheless, it is possible to characterize the history of Fātimid administration as one of progressive centralization and consolidation.

The earliest feature of Fātimid administration in Egypt was its continuity with the skeletal and highly decentralized Ikhshidid administration. Like many other conquerors, Jawhar maintained local administrative practices

and personnel, employing many Sunnī Muslims and Copts. The former Ikhshīdī wazīr, Ibn al-Furāt, kept his post, as did the tax collectors. The presence of a new dynastic authority was visible mainly in the attachment of north African inspectors and supervisors to the tax collectors and the bureaus managing the estates of the defeated Ikhshīdī regiments.

Upon his arrival in Egypt in 363/973, Caliph al-Mu'izz initiated a massive reorganization of Egyptian administration under the supervision of Ya'qūb ibn Killis, an Iraqi merchant who had come to Egypt to serve the Ikhshīdī court. Al-Mu'izz appointed Ibn Killis and another official as chief tax-collectors and directors of all financial affairs; they consolidated the collection of taxes in the administrative complex adjacent to the Ibn Tūlūn Mosque. This new organization increased tax revenues, especially from the Delta textile towns of Tinnis and Damietta. In addition to centralizing tax collection, Ibn Killis reorganized the administrative *dīwāns* and introduced a system of checks and balances by duplicating administrative functions in more than one *dīwān*. He began to employ north Africans (*maghribīs*) in addition to indigenous Sunnī or Coptic scribes, who were continuously employed by the Fātimid state until its demise.

The newly organized *dīwāns* also implemented the Fātimids' new monetary policies. Just before the conquest of Egypt, the Ikhshīdī state suffered a monetary crisis and its coinage was seriously debased. Jāwhar minted new gold coins, called Mu'izzī *dinars*, of a very high intrinsic value, withdrew the debased coinage from circulation, and demanded that taxes be paid only in the new Mu'izzī *dinars*, a policy that was surely aided by the centralization of the tax collection. The high degree of fineness of their coins was sustained throughout the Fātimid period, even during the economic crises of the reign of al-Mustansīr, and was an important element in maintaining the general economic stability of the state.

The administration of justice was not organized into *dīwāns*, but its functions were divided instead among several offices. As in other states in the medieval Islamic world, a distinction was made between justice based on the religious law (*sharī'a*), and administrative justice (*mazālim*), although the two functions were frequently carried out by the chief judge (*qādī al-qudāt*). When the Fātimids first came to Egypt, the caliph retained the chief judge already in place. In the reign of al-'Azīz, however, the first Ismā'īlī chief judge was appointed. He was 'Ali ibn al-Nu'mān, the son of the great jurist and architect of Ismā'īlī jurisprudence, al-Qādī al-Nu'mān. From this time on, justice was administered primarily in accordance with Ismā'īlī law, but Sunnī jurists continued to serve as judges and, in the later Fātimid period, on occasion even as chief judge. In the twelfth century, the functions of the chief judge were often assumed by the wazīr, who also held the title *qādī al-qudāt*. At this time, the chief judge was considered to be a deputy of the wazīr.

One of the most frequently used mechanisms for enlisting the assistance of the state and dispensing justice was the petition. Because of the existence in the Cairo Geniza (the treasure trove of documents emanating from the Jewish community of Fusṭāṭ-Cairo in the Fātimid and Ayyūbid periods) of a significant number of actual petitions and decrees, we are able to document the composition of petitions and the administrative procedures used in answering them, something which is not possible for most other aspects of Fātimid administration, where we must rely almost exclusively on later literary sources. Depending on the structures in place at any given time, petitions were addressed to the caliph, the wazīr, or, sometimes, to judges. Until the introduction of military wazirs with Badr al-Jamālī, petitions were ordinarily collected outside one of the gates of the palace and then sent to the Chancery, where high officials either made their own decisions or sought the advice of the caliph or wazīr. The petition was then endorsed and the answer was rewritten in a fair copy by an official in the Chancery known as the “secretary of the thick pen” (*ṣāhib al-qalam al-jalil*), who inserted all the proper titles and blessings, and it was signed by the caliph. The petition was then either returned with the endorsement to the sender or it was sent to the Chancery where a decree was drawn up. In late Fātimid times, the wazīrs held public audiences to receive petitions. The petition was available to both individuals and communities, and almost any dispute or problem might be submitted to the caliph or wazīr. The Geniza documents include, for example, petitions requesting the return of a church to the Christian community and the resolution of a dispute within the Jewish community that led to the closing of a synagogue. But a large number of petitions were submitted by individuals and concern a wide variety of problems. Some of these petitions from individuals requested relief from the actions of the government and its representatives by means of investigation into the impounding of a poor man’s property, the granting of various allowances, the release of a man who had been detained, or relief from the poll tax. Some pleaded for justice in the aftermath of criminal activity, as in a petition to the caliph from a father who requested the arrest of the captain and sailors of a Nile boat, who had killed his son and stolen his money and goods. Many petitions asked for the government’s intervention in entirely private affairs, such as disputes over the repayment of debts or over property.<sup>6</sup>

The police and market inspectors (*muhtasib*) of Cairo and Fusṭāṭ were essentially municipal officials, but they were appointed directly by the

<sup>6</sup> On the history of the petition, see Geoffrey Khan, *Arabic Legal and Administrative Documents in the Cambridge Genizah Collections* (Cambridge, 1993), 303ff.; G. Khan, “The historical development of the structure of medieval Arabic petitions,” *BSOAS*, 53 (1990), 8–30; S. M. Stern, “Three petitions of the Fātimid period,” *Oriens*, 15 (1962), 172–209.

central government because they were in the capital. These offices are difficult to characterize: they were held by individuals with a variety of backgrounds, and, although they were not, strictly speaking, religious offices, the functions exercised often converged with religious law and administration. The chief of police, for example, was sometimes a jurist, more often not. Clashes between the chief of police and the chief judge over questions of jurisdiction were not unusual. And some responsibilities, for example, imposing the Qur'anically prescribed punishments (*hudūd*) on criminals, were firmly rooted in religious law. The supervision of markets (*hisba*) stood at the intersection of religious law, municipal administration, and marketplace ethics. Its authority was expressed in formal religious terms ("to enjoin the good and forbid evil"), though it could scarcely be considered a religious institution; in theory, its jurisdiction ranged from keeping the streets clear, inspecting weights and measures, and controlling quality to ensuring the proper maintenance of mosques and enforcing the requirement that Jews and Christians wear distinctive marks on their clothing; in reality, one of its primary functions was to ensure the availability of grain and bread in the market during times of scarcity and to execute the government's grain policy.<sup>7</sup> More even than policing, the *hisba* would have to be characterized as primarily an urban institution, and one of relatively low prestige at that, if we are to judge from the bitter complaint of an official who had just been appointed to the post: "I was a companion of the caliph and the keeper of his purse. Should I now become a *muhtasib*? I shall not!"<sup>8</sup>

The large and complex Fātimid army required substantial economic and administrative resources. As in other parts of the Islamic world from the tenth to the twelfth centuries, a large share of the state's budget and bureaucratic apparatus was dedicated to the military. The Fātimid army was administered by the Office of the Army (*diwān al-jaysh*), which was divided into several sections charged with maintaining complete registers, distributing pay, and administering lands allocated to the army. These different sections display the salient feature of duplication for checks and balances that was typical of Fātimid bureaucracies after the tenth century. One section was charged with maintaining complete registers of the soldiers and officers in all regiments, including the district from which the revenues for salaries were drawn, the type of each soldier's equipment, his physical appearance, and his martial skills. These registers were updated through

<sup>7</sup> See H. Haji, "Institutions of Justice in Fatimid Egypt," in A. al-Azmeh (ed.), *Islamic Law and Historical Contexts* (London, 1988), 198–214; Lev, *State and Society*, 162–78; Boaz Shoshan, "Fatimid Grain Policy and the Post of Muhtasib," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 13 (1981), 181–89.

<sup>8</sup> Al-Musabbihi, *Akhbār Miṣr* [Tome Quarantième de la Chronique d'Egypte de Musabbihi], ed. Ayman Fu'ād Sayyid and Thierry Bianquis (Cairo, 1978), 14.

periodic military reviews and inspections.<sup>9</sup> Another office registered the names of both civil and military employees who received cash salaries and distributed payments, an arrangement that can perhaps be taken as evidence of the increasing militarization of the state from the middle of the eleventh century onward. At the end of the tenth century, salaries were paid eight times a year, but by the middle of the eleventh century, payment was monthly. In addition to their monthly salaries, soldiers in the capital received special bonuses, and troops generally received a special payment before a campaign or when a new caliph ascended the throne. The *iqtā'* system, which increasingly replaced cash payments to the military, required a very substantial bureaucracy to record and administer the land grants, many of which were in the provinces.

### *Economic life and economic policy*

Egypt was generally prosperous during the Fātimid period, and this good fortune was owed largely to geography: the Nile allowed intensive cultivation. When the Nile flooded properly, Egypt produced abundant quantities of wheat and other grains, with surpluses for export. From the early Islamic period on, Egypt had been a significant supplier of wheat to the holy cities of Mecca and Medina, and it was the main food crop. Bread was made primarily from wheat, but a poorer variety was made also from barley, the grain being cultivated mainly to feed beasts of burden.<sup>10</sup> Cotton, which from the nineteenth century has been a staple of Egyptian agriculture, was virtually unknown as a crop, although large quantities of finished cotton goods were imported. The main industrial crop was flax, and twenty-two local varieties of it were cultivated. There is no other cash crop for which we possess such voluminous documentation. The preparation of flax fiber (as opposed to finished linen textiles) was a primary industry, and it was a mainstay of international trade. The quantities were so large that merchants specialized in it, and it was ordinarily traded in bales of 350 to 600 pounds.<sup>11</sup> Linseed oil, commonly used for lighting, was readily available because of the extensive flax cultivation. On the other hand, olive oil, an important ingredient in the daily diet of medieval Egyptians, was almost exclusively an import.

Egypt's flourishing economy in the Fātimid period was founded not only upon agriculture but also on international trade. As producer and consumer,

<sup>9</sup> Hamblin, "The Fatimid Army", 106ff.; B. J. Beshir, "Fatimid Military Organization," *Der Islam*, 55 (1978), 37–53; "ard" Elz.

<sup>10</sup> S. D. Goitein, *A Mediterranean Society: The Jewish Communities of the Arab World as Portrayed in the Documents of the Cairo Geniza*, 6 vols. (Berkeley, 1967–1993), I, 116–118.

<sup>11</sup> Goitein, *Mediterranean Society*, I, 104–105, 224.

importer and exporter, Egypt reaped the benefits of sitting at the intersection of two international trade routes and having access to both the Mediterranean Sea and the Indian Ocean. This unique position also helped to protect Fātimid trading interests when routes were occasionally shut off. The shift in trade from Ifriqiya (Tunisia) to Egypt in the tenth century and the migration of traders to Egypt is not unrelated to the Fātimid move east. The loss of the Syrian territories to the Crusaders did not deal a death blow to Fātimid trade; in fact, the diversion of traffic from the Red Sea to the Nile valley worked in some respects to the advantage of the Fātimids. The intensification of Indian Ocean trade in the twelfth century and the Fātimids' interest in protecting the Red Sea trade route and trade along the Nile valley should probably be taken as part of the context for the large number of military wazirs in the twelfth century who came from the Upper Egyptian city of Qūṣ.<sup>12</sup>

But geography alone does not create trade networks. In the Mediterranean of the tenth to the twelfth centuries, men enjoyed an extraordinary degree of freedom of movement. The existence of political boundaries, even hostilities between governments, rarely interfered with the movement of persons or goods around the Mediterranean. Similarly, embargoes on exports or imports were very rare. The governments around the Mediterranean were much more likely to exercise their prerogative by claiming rights as first buyer than by banning merchandise.<sup>13</sup>

In addition to this freedom of movement, the Fātimid state produced coins of such fineness and reliability that they were considered to be an international currency (at a time when coins were a commodity as well as a currency). One of the reasons that the Fātimids were able to sustain the intrinsic quality of their coins was a plentiful supply of gold. When al-Mu'izz came to Egypt in 361/972, he brought one hundred camels laden with gold bars shaped like millstones. The Fātimids also had access to the gold mines of Upper Egypt and Nubia, which they exploited until the costs of production outstripped the yield. Both the mines and the pharaonic tombs, which had been a major source of gold for the Tūlūnids, began to run out in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. But until almost the end of the Fātimid period, the state maintained the fineness of its coins.<sup>14</sup>

Most international trade was carried out by sea. Overland travel was not a popular mode of transportation for either persons or goods, even for trade

<sup>12</sup> See Jean-Claude Garcin, *Un centre musulman de la Haute-Égypte médiévale: Qūṣ* (Cairo, 1976), 79–118.

<sup>13</sup> Goitein, *Mediterranean Society*, 1, 59–70.

<sup>14</sup> J. Devisse, "Trade and trade routes in West Africa," *General History of Africa*, ed. M. El Fasi (London, 1988), III, 367–435; A. S. Ehrenkreutz, "Contributions to the Knowledge of the Fiscal Administration of Egypt in the Middle Ages," *BSOAS*, 16 (1954), 502–14.

between Egypt and Tunisia, where caravan travel would have seemed more likely. While this situation was partly due to exigencies of the times – the Bedouin invasions of the mid-eleventh century increased the danger of piracy – even before these new threats, sea travel had been preferred. The sea posed its own dangers, although merchants made a distinction between the relative calm and safety of the Mediterranean Sea and the greater risks of the Indian Ocean.<sup>15</sup>

International trade posed significant hazards to both men and their merchandise. Merchants in the Fātimid period sought to reduce their financial and personal risks by forming partnerships usually limited to a single venture. Partnerships were a substitute for two forms of business association that were viewed with suspicion and only rarely practiced: employment and loans on interest. Free men viewed the dependence inherent in being in the employ of another as a humiliation; borrowing money entailed the same dependency, and, in any case, loans on interest were looked at askance by religious law. Two types of partnership were especially common. The first was *shirkā*, in which partners shared profit and loss in direct proportion to their investment. The second was *commenda* (called *qirād* or *mudāraba*), in which one or more partners contributed capital or goods, and the other partners did the work; the latter ordinarily took only one-third of the profits, but they assumed no risk for losses. Although such partnerships were common, the most important means of carrying out international commerce was informal business cooperation, or “formal friendship” (*subba*). The majority of business transactions were carried out using this elaborate system of exchanging favors, and such relations often lasted throughout the lifetime of the parties involved.<sup>16</sup>

There is little of a general nature that can be said about economic policy in the Fātimid period except that it is difficult to generalize about it. Although scholars have generally claimed that the prosperity of the Fātimid period was owed largely to a laissez faire policy of the dynasty, it is more accurate to observe that Fātimid economic policy fluctuated a great deal, and depended largely on the conditions and demands of any given time and place.<sup>17</sup> Fātimid economic policy was a complex phenomenon, the product both of flexibility and responsiveness to change and of a style of interaction between government and merchants, where the lines between commerce and administration, between individuals acting for their own profit and those same men acting on behalf of the government, were often blurred.

The official sources are largely silent when it comes to the business of financial administration, which was carried out by agents and revenue

<sup>15</sup> Goitein, *Mediterranean Society*, I, 43.

<sup>16</sup> Goitein, *Mediterranean Society*, I, 64–179.

<sup>17</sup> Goitein, *Mediterranean Society*, I, 267; Shoshan, “Fatimid Grain Policy,” 181.

farmers rather than by employees receiving fixed salaries from the government.<sup>18</sup> These agents and tax-farmers were paid by the job and most of the tax-farmers were attached to a particular locality. Most of them were merchants or industrialists and had intimate knowledge of the industry and its representatives from which they collected revenues. This knowledge was crucial given the relative lack of bureaucratic process in the collection of taxes by the government. That is to say, the government relied on the existing networks and in particular on the knowledge of the agents and tax-farmers who carried out its business. The business of administration was firmly embedded in the day-to-day social and economic life of the country. In general, the financial administration of the Fātimid state was carried out less by high-level officials than by merchants and businessmen who acted for, but were not a part of, the government. This system of financial administration was organized to a large extent along the same lines and involved many of the same people as commercial networks. The cooperation between merchants and the government extended beyond the narrow limits of tax collection.

The representative of the merchants (*wakil al-tujjār*) is perhaps the most striking example of this ambiguity between economic and administrative roles. The *wakil al-tujjār* was a merchant whose administrative functions derived from his position within the commercial community. He was usually a foreigner, or the son of a foreign merchant, who had settled in a city and had won the respect and trust of his compatriots who were staying there and of the local business community. Initially, he carried out business for merchants from his homeland in their absence, but ultimately he might be entrusted with the business of local merchants as well.<sup>19</sup>

In addition to his commercial activities, the *wakil al-tujjār* collected taxes, fees, and dues from merchants and conveyed them to the government. But these official functions were not his primary occupation. His ability to act on behalf of the government was not the result of a formal appointment. Rather, the government was able to exploit the position of the *wakil al-tujjār* within his community for its own purposes: the collection of taxes.<sup>20</sup> The highly informal nature of the office of representative of the merchants is shown further by the nearly complete silence of Arabic literary, historical, and financial treatises about them. But this office is richly documented in the Cairo Geniza.<sup>21</sup> Although there are references to warehouses (*dār al-wakālas*), there is almost no corresponding information about the men who

<sup>18</sup> Goitein, *Mediterranean Society*, I, 267–72; II, 354.

<sup>19</sup> See Goitein, *Mediterranean Society*, I, 186–92; A. L. Udovitch, "Merchants and Amirs: Government and Trade in Eleventh-Century Egypt," *Asian and African Studies*, 22 (1988), 53–72.

<sup>20</sup> Udovitch, "Merchants and Amirs," 65.

<sup>21</sup> See Goitein, *Mediterranean Society*, VI, s.v. "Representative of the merchants."

operated them. The short necrology of a Muslim *wakil al-tujjār* in the history of the Muslim historian al-Musabbiḥī is an exception. He was one Abū Ismā'īl Ibrāhīm ibn Tājj, who had “come upon great fortune and turned to acting as a representative of merchants. Commodities and merchandise were brought to him from everywhere. He left an inheritance of great wealth.”<sup>22</sup> No other authors make any mention of the *wakil al-tujjār* in their detailed descriptions of administration in the Fātimid and Ayyubid states.

The presence of the government was felt primarily in its role both as producer and as the largest consumer in the country.<sup>23</sup> Agricultural products were bought from or through the government. This was particularly true of flax, the largest export product and the staple of the Egyptian economy in the Fātimid period. As a consumer, the government was wealthy enough to buy at prices that were prohibitive for all others. It also had the prerogative of being first buyer of incoming goods, a situation that often resulted in the outright appropriation of goods, even against the will of the merchants, who were forced to sell at artificially low prices and sometimes had difficulty collecting their money. During the reign of al-Muṣṭanṣir, a Commerce Bureau (*matjar*) was established to organize the state's preemptive purchasing rights. In a letter written in the early 1120s, a merchant complains bitterly: “The other item was taken by the governmental wardrobe, may God make permanent his [the ruler's] reign, and, thus far, no payment has been made.” The appropriation of the beleaguered merchant's goods was probably not an isolated incident; it occurred at the same time that the government was dramatically increasing its own distributions of ceremonial costumes, which in 516/1122 reached a staggering 14,305 pieces.<sup>24</sup>

### *Urban life and cultural pluralism*

Although Islamic civilization in general and Fātimid culture in particular were highly urbanized, the majority of men and women in medieval Egypt lived in the countryside. Egypt's great cities, therefore, while yielding the information that we tend to think of as being characteristic of Fātimid culture, were in fact atypical. In the Fātimid period, Egypt was, as it continued to be until recent times, primarily agricultural and rural. And though we tend to think of the distinctive categories as urban and rural, there were in fact important differences among Egypt's regions and her major cities. Three urban centers in particular, tied to each other as entrepôts on the vast Mediterranean Sea–Indian Ocean trade continuum, merit

<sup>22</sup> See al-Musabbiḥī, *Akhbār Miṣr*, 108.

<sup>23</sup> Goitein, *Mediterranean Society*, I, 267.

<sup>24</sup> Al-Maqrīzī, *Kitāb al-mawā'iz wa'l-i'tibār bi-dhikr al-khiṭāṭ wa'l-āthār* (Būlāq, 1853), I, 410; Ibn al-Mā'mūn al-Baṭā'iḥī, *Nuṣūṣ min akhbār miṣr*, ed. Ayman Fu'ād Sayyid as *Passages de la Chronique d'Egypte d'Ibn al-Mā'mūn* (Cairo 1983), 48–55.

some discussion: Alexandria, Fustāt-Cairo, and Qūṣ. Each exemplifies a different aspect of urbanism and each had a distinctive character in the Fātimid period.

Fustāt-Cairo was the political and administrative, as well as the financial and commercial, capital of the Fātimid state. Although it is appropriate to speak of these twin cities as a single entity with respect to the rest of Egypt and the Fātimid empire, Fustāt and Cairo remained separate and had distinctive characters in relation to one another. As late as the 1240s, when the Maghribī traveler Ibn Sa‘id visited Cairo, the difference was still palpable; he remarked on the graciousness and friendliness of the residents of Fustāt in contrast to those of Cairo, although the two cities were barely two miles apart.<sup>25</sup>

Early Cairo consisted of two palaces and a congregational mosque, the Azhar, all enclosed by a brick wall. The city had an unmistakably Ismā‘ili character. By the early eleventh century, Cairo possessed another congregational mosque, the Mosque of al-Hākim, which quickly assumed an importance equal to that of the Azhar in ceremonial life. In the late eleventh and early twelfth century, Cairo’s walls were extended and rebuilt, and monumental stone gates were added. At this time, Cairo was still essentially a closed city and it had no independent commercial life, but civilians who served the court (like physicians), and even some highly placed Jewish and Christian officials, resided there; the head of the Palestinian academy (*yeshiva*) Maṣlīḥ Gaon and his entourage of scholars settled in Cairo when he arrived in Egypt in 1127.<sup>26</sup> By the twelfth century, Cairo was beginning to develop its own commercial interests. The Fātimid wazīr al-Ma’mūn al-Baṭā’ihī established a *dār al-wakāla* for Syrian and Iraqi merchants in the 1120s as well as a new mint.

But Cairo could not, and did not, rival its neighboring city Fustāt as Egypt’s economic center, her major emporium, and the site of all important commercial transactions. Customs duties were paid on all imported consignments in Fustāt; merchants from even the great port cities came to Fustāt to acquire Mediterranean commodities, including foreign currency; even goods destined for ordinary use (like shoes) were ordered from there.<sup>27</sup> It was, by all accounts, a booming metropolis, an open city where people came and

<sup>25</sup> Al-Maqrīzī, *al-Khitāṭ*, I, 342, quoting Ibn Sa‘id; cited in Gaston Wiet, *Cairo: City of Art and Commerce*, tr. Seymour Feiler (Oklahoma, 1964), 49; and Goitein, *Mediterranean Society*, IV, 11.

<sup>26</sup> Goitein, *Mediterranean Society*, IV, 11. Other heads of the community had houses also in Fustāt.

<sup>27</sup> Goitein, *Mediterranean Society*, I, 4; S. D. Goitein, *Letters of Medieval Jewish Traders* (Princeton, 1973), 24–25; A. L. Udovitch, “A Tale of Two Cities: Commercial Relations between Cairo and Alexandria During the Second Half of the Eleventh Century,” in Harry A. Miskimin, David Herlihy, A. L. Udovitch (eds.), *The Medieval City* (New Haven, 1977), 143–62.

went with ease, whose rhythms were determined partly by the ritual calendars of its religious communities and partly by the comings and goings of ships and caravans. Fustāṭ maintained the larger and more diverse population, comprised of Sunnī Muslims, Christians, and Jews. Its Mosque of ‘Amr, at the heart of Fustāṭ’s commercial district, was the Friday mosque for the Muslim population as well as the terminal point for parades on Nawrūz, the Coptic New Year.

Alexandria, like other ports of the Islamic world, was considered to be a frontier fortress (*thaghr*). The ‘Abbāsids built a city wall there in the ninth century which the Fātimids, like other dynasties from the tenth to the sixteenth centuries, restored.<sup>28</sup> By the Fātimid era, Alexandria had long since ceased to be a capital, having been displaced by Fustāṭ at the time of the Arab conquest; but it continued to be sufficiently important for Alexandria along with Fustāṭ to be the only cities in Egypt with their own budget and chief judge.

Alexandria possessed two harbors, one for Christian and one for Muslim ships. By the eleventh century, it had both a *dār al-wakāla* (serving as both customs house and warehouse) and a Commerce Bureau (*matjar*), where the government exercised its right of first purchase. The famous Pharos lighthouse, built in the Ptolemaic era, was still standing in 1165, when it was described by the historian al-Balawī. Throughout the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, Alexandria was a center for trading imported spices, slaves, and silk, as well as its own locally produced textiles, for which it was famous. But in spite of its preeminent location on the Mediterranean, and its importance in international trade, Alexandria remained in the Fātimid period a “commercial suburb of Fustāṭ,” and merchants complained continually of the paucity of its markets.<sup>29</sup>

Alexandria was full of foreigners, many of them from around the Mediterranean rim. Unlike Fustāṭ, where people tended to settle permanently and marry into local families, Alexandria’s foreigners were often temporary residents, and there were many violent clashes between them and the local inhabitants. Indeed, Alexandria was known for its propensity for unruliness and insurrection. In 467/1074, Badr al-Jamāli had to put down the insurrection of a naval regiment in Alexandria. When Badr’s son al-Awhad led a group of soldiers and Bedouins in revolt against his father in

<sup>28</sup> Jamāl al-din al-Shayyāl, *Ta’rikh madinat al-iskāndariyyah fi al-‘asr al-islāmi* (Cairo, 1967), 41–52; Sayyid ‘Abd al-Aziz Sālim, *Ta’rikh al-iskāndariyyah wa-hadāratuhā fi al-‘asr al-islāmi* (Cairo, 1961), 55–66.

<sup>29</sup> See Udovitch, “Tale of Two Cities,” esp. 158, and Abraham L. Udovitch, “Medieval Alexandria: Some Evidence from the Cairo Genizah Documents,” *Alexandria and Alexandrianism: papers delivered at a symposium organized by the J. Paul Getty Museum and the Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities and held at the Museum, April 22–25, 1993* (Malibu, CA, 1996), 273–84.

477/1084, the rebels took refuge in Alexandria. It is not surprising, therefore, that in the aftermath of al-Afdal's enthronement of al-Musta'li in 487/1094, the displaced Nizār fled to Alexandria, where the local inhabitants took an oath of loyalty to him.

Because of its proximity to north Africa and Spain, Alexandria had a large Maghribī population that increased in the aftermath of the Fātimid conquest and the shift of trade to Egypt. Most of its Jewish minority of around 3,000 were Maghribī immigrants. Its Christian community consisted of Copts and Melkites, and it was the seat of the Coptic patriarchate until the early eleventh century. Most probably because of the strong Maghribī presence, it seems to have developed into a center for Sunni learning, particularly for the Mālikī and Shāfi'i schools of law. In the late eleventh century, a number of distinguished Mālikīs settled in Alexandria, including the Banū Ḥadīd family of Toledo and the jurist al-Turtūshī, who wrote a manual of government for the Fātimid wazīr al-Ma'mūn al-Baṭā'ihi. In the twelfth century, the Fātimid wazīrs Ridwān ibn Walakshi and Ibn al-Sallār established in Alexandria the first of the colleges of law (*madrasas*) that would contribute to the revival of Sunnīsm in Egypt even before the end of the Fātimid period.<sup>30</sup>

Qūṣ was a dependency of Aswān in early Fātimid times. Aswān was unique among the largely Christian cities of Upper Egypt in having a majority of Muslims among its inhabitants, and it was the site at which commodities brought by caravan from the Red Sea port of 'Aydhāb were transferred to the Nile. Its distance from Cairo and its large Muslim population, however, made it a popular refuge for rebels. In the aftermath of the crises of the eleventh century, Aswān became the haven for the rebellious black troops who had been expelled from the capital. At this troubled moment, Qūṣ was chosen as the new administrative capital of Upper Egypt, probably because its population was largely Christian. In the eleventh and twelfth centuries, the economy of Qūṣ flourished as it displaced Aswān as the Nile terminal for the 'Aydhāb caravan route that was central to the Indian Ocean trade; it became also the favorite stop of Muslim pilgrim caravans which, after the establishment of the Crusader states, no longer had access to the overland routes to the Hijāz through Palestine. The city's centrality continued into the Ayyūbid period, when the traveler Ibn Jubayr could say that it "is a city of fine markets and of ample amenities, and it has many beings in it because of the comings and goings of pilgrims and of merchants from India, the Yemen, and Ethiopia. It is a place where all may come upon, a place of alighting for the traveller, a gathering place for companies of wayfarers, and a meeting place for pilgrims from the Maghrib,

<sup>30</sup> See Lev, *State and Society*, 139–40 n. 30; Gary Leiser, "The Madrasa and the Islamization of the Middle East: The Case of Egypt," *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt*, 22 (1985), 29–47.

from Misr, from Alexandria and from adjoining lands. From here they go into the desert of 'Aydhab, and here they return on their way back from the Hajj [pilgrimage]."<sup>31</sup> In the twelfth century, the town had its own mint (established in 1122) and the power of its governors, who had at their disposal a large military force, rivalled that of the wazirs. Indeed, a number of the wazirs of the twelfth century were former governors of Qūṣ. All this benefitted the Christian community there, which was able to build or rebuild during this period dozens of its churches. In the long run, the new administrative and economic importance of Qūṣ would lead to the internal migration of Muslims, the establishment of a judgeship for the northern part of Upper Egypt, and increasing Islamization.<sup>32</sup>

In medieval times, people used the comprehensive term *al-rif* ("the Province") to refer not only to the rural countryside but also to the many cities, towns, and villages that were to be distinguished from Egypt's great cities of Fustāt-Cairo and Alexandria. Even large and important cities like Damietta, a major Mediterranean sea port on the eastern arm of the Nile, were part of the Rif.<sup>33</sup> The Rif's relative isolation was used to the advantage of defaulting debtors who hoped to elude their creditors, as well as by Christians and Jews who could not afford to pay the poll tax. But the Rif was not cut off from the major cities. There was continual migration in both directions, and smaller cities and towns were an important part of the large networks of commerce and trade that had as their center the great cities. They were often the terminal point for goods, particularly textiles, peddled by merchants from the large cities; but they were also points for the resale of merchandise to even smaller communities.<sup>34</sup>

Medieval Egyptians shared modern prejudices regarding the sophistication of country people. A man writing to an acquaintance in Cairo complained that he could not find anyone civilized in the small town to which he had been sent. A woman in al-Mahalla al-Kubrā, a provincial capital and industrial center, complained that she could not bear life in the Rif and ran away to Cairo. Her husband offered to move to Damietta, which, he said, was the best he could do for her and still make a living; Fustāt was simply too expensive.<sup>35</sup>

At the beginning of the Fātimid period, the majority of Egypt's rural population was still Christian and spoke Coptic. By the end, a large number

<sup>31</sup> Ibn Jubayr, *The Travels of Ibn Jubayr*, trans. R. J. C. Broadhurst (London, 1952), 57–58.

<sup>32</sup> See Garcin, *Un centre musulman*, 120–22.

<sup>33</sup> Goitein, *Mediterranean Society*, IV, 9–10.

<sup>34</sup> Goitein, *Mediterranean Society*, II, 45; IV, 10.

<sup>35</sup> Goitein, *Mediterranean Society*, III, 150, 177; IV, 9–10; Mark Cohen, "Geniza documents concerning a conflict in a provincial Egyptian Jewish Community during the Nagidate of Mevorakh B. Saadya," in S. Morag, I. Ben-Ami, N. A. Stillman (eds.), *Studies in Judaism and Islam* (Jerusalem, 1981), 123–54.

of rural Egyptians were still Christian, but their language was now Arabic. Coptic had disappeared earlier in the cities, and by the ninth and tenth centuries most urban Egyptians knew Arabic.<sup>36</sup> This was especially true of the Christians, who served as financial and administrative officials in the Fātimid government, as they had under earlier Islamic regimes. In the tenth century, Sawīrus (Severus) ibn al-Muqaffa', bishop of the Middle Egyptian town of al-Ashmūnayn, complained that nobody now understood Coptic and wrote the first Coptic theological treatise in Arabic. By the eleventh century, the Coptic community was producing large numbers of Arabic texts. Jews, many of whom served the Fātimid government, also embraced Arabic, though they ordinarily wrote it in Hebrew characters.<sup>37</sup> By the tenth century, Jews nearly always used Arabic for prose writing, though poetry continued to be written in Hebrew.<sup>38</sup> The first translation of the Hebrew bible into Arabic was completed around 925 by Saadya Gaon (882–942), who originated in the Fayyūm region of Egypt.<sup>39</sup> The Fātimid period thus marked the time when the Christian and Jewish communities of Egypt became definitively Arabophone, and when they began to produce significant literary output in Arabic. Arabic was the language of daily life, of the marketplace, and of literary production within communities. It was also the language of debate and polemic between religious communities. The Fātimid court itself played a major role in such polemics. There are accounts, for example, of interconfessional debates at the *majlis* (weekly court) of the wazīr Ya'qūb ibn Killis between a Jew and the Bishop Sawīrus ibn al-Muqaffa', in which the wazīr himself also participated.<sup>40</sup>

### *The character of Fātimid rule*

The Fātimids ruled a complex state in which much of their energy and attention was necessarily dedicated to balancing factions competing for power. But what characterized the rule of the Fātimids, especially given the

<sup>36</sup> Khalif Samir, "Arabic sources for early Egyptian Christianity," in Birger A. Pearson and James E. Goehring (eds.), *The Roots of Egyptian Christianity* (Philadelphia, 1986), 82–97.

<sup>37</sup> See Joshua Blau, *The Emergence and Linguistic background of Judaeo-Arabic* (Oxford, 1965), esp. 19–50.

<sup>38</sup> This situation should be compared with that of the Jews in Mesopotamia at the same time. In urban areas they spoke Arabic, but in rural areas they continued to speak Aramaic. See Rina Drory, "'Words beautifully put': Hebrew versus Arabic in tenth-century Jewish literature," in Joshua Blau and Stefan Reif (eds.), *Geniza research after ninety years: The case of Judaeo-Arabic* (Cambridge, 1992), 53–66.

<sup>39</sup> This is disputed by Joshua Blau, "On a fragment of the oldest Judaeo-Arabic Bible translation extant," *Geniza research after ninety years*, 31–39, who argues, based on spelling, that Geniza fragment T-S Ar. 53.8 is older.

<sup>40</sup> See Mark Cohen and Sasson Somekh, "In the court of Ya'qūb ibn Killis: a fragment from the Cairo Genizah," *Jewish Quarterly Review*, 30 (1990), 283–314.

dramatic transition from a civilian to a basically military administration and the rise of military wazirs whose power by the end of the eleventh century eclipsed that of the caliph? In the face of such changes and such competition, what provided political continuity in the Fātimid state?

Patronage was one of the glues that held this political system together, and in employing it the Fātimids were like many of their contemporaries who ruled states in the medieval Islamic world.<sup>41</sup> In the early Fātimid period, the caliphs commanded sufficient resources, power, and authority to manipulate the elaborate patronage system in their own interests. They did this in several ways: by constructing an elaborate court bureaucracy and central administration staffed with personnel who owed them loyalty, by providing reliably and generously for the Berber tribal armies that had come with them from north Africa, by adding to their army slave troops whose dependence was assumed (often wrongly) to assure their allegiance. For much of the first century of Fātimid rule, the resources for pursuing this expensive means of control were considerable, and the Fātimid family was able to exploit networks of patronage to keep factions in balance. The administrators who ran the state were also directly dependent upon Fātimid royal patronage for their authority. Beginning in the 1020s, administrators under the patronage of different members of the Fātimid family and in turn controlling their own patronage networks began to rise to power. This pattern emerged during the reign of al-Zāhir, who was a youth when he ascended the throne and was quickly the object of an elaborate struggle for influence between first his aunt Sitt al-Mulk and then his most senior civilian administrators.<sup>42</sup> The patronage system was intensified in the early years of al-Mustanṣir's reign, when al-Sayyida Raṣad, a freed slave and the mother of the caliph, secured an appointment for her former master, Abū Sa'd al-Tustari, as the head of her *diwān*; Abū Sa'd then used this position of influence to depose one wazir and install another, a situation that led to considerable resistance by the army and which led ultimately to Abū Sa'd's murder by the Turkish regiments. Patronage reached its height and became a permanent feature of Fātimid political culture in the later years of al-Mustanṣir's reign, when the military wazirs (beginning with the dynasty of Badr al-Jamālī) of the eleventh and twelfth centuries nurtured their own independent patronage networks that accompanied the increasingly broad military, judicial, and administrative authority that they wielded. They had access to wider networks of patronage to manipulate in their own interests, and these interests often competed with those of the dynasty they served. The second century of Fātimid rule, therefore, is characterized not so much by the breakdown of

<sup>41</sup> The most elaborate analysis of this feature of medieval Islamic political culture is in Roy P. Mottahedeh, *Loyalty and Leadership in an Early Islamic Society* (Princeton, 1980).

<sup>42</sup> Lev, *State and Society*, 38–39.

the patronage system, as by the transfer of control of the patronage system from the dynasty to the wazirs.

Even after their loss of real political and military power, the Fātimid caliphs maintained their symbolic position as head of the state and ultimate authority. This fiction of dynastic supremacy was perpetuated largely through ceremonial activity, and with the full complicity of the wazirs who were denying the caliphs real power. The Fātimids participated fully in the general political culture of the Islamic world during the tenth to the twelfth centuries, and they appropriated the highly generalized symbols of authority that most Islamic rulers used to articulate their claims to legitimacy. They wore special costumes (usually white, the dynasty's color) and used the conventional insignia of sovereignty: the specially wound turban called *tāj*, staff, sword, parasol, inkstand, lance, shield, banners, flywhisks, ceremonial arms, drums, and tents. Like other Islamic rulers, they also exercised the prerogatives of pronouncing the caliph's name in the Friday sermon (*khuṭba*) and inscribing his name on coins (*sikka*) and on textiles (*tirāz*).<sup>43</sup>

But although the Fātimids' court protocol and audiences resembled that of their contemporaries (and most particularly their chief rivals, the 'Abbāsids), their practices were also distinct in one important way: they made extensive use of urban processions. These processions expressed not only general claims to political and military authority, but also the more specialized claims associated with the Fātimids' role as Ismā'īlī imāms. In fact, the development of the city of Cairo in the Fātimid period is partly a function of the role it played in expressing the Fātimids' Ismā'īlism and their evolving relations with the largely Sunnī population that they governed most directly in Cairo and Fustāt.

In the early years of their rule in Egypt, the Fātimids combined architecture, topography, and inscriptions to construct Cairo as an Ismā'īlī city. The palace stood at the symbolic center of the city, just as the imam stood at the center of Ismā'īlī belief. The central position of the palace and imāms was expressed in theology and panegyric poetry, as well as in spatial relations. The imam was considered to be an emanation of the divine light, and many epithets described his brilliance and luminosity. As new mosques were constructed in Cairo throughout the Fātimid period, they came to be known by names evoking this special quality.

The first mosque to be established by the Fātimids, al-Azhar, was not connected to the palace, but stood nearby, to the southeast. The second mosque, begun just outside the original northern brick walls of the city by al-'Aziz and finished by al-Hākim in 1010, was called both the Mosque of al-Hākim and al-Anwar. Its monumental inscribed doorway, the construction of two minarets rather than one, and the monumental inscriptions on

<sup>43</sup> See Paula Sanders, *Ritual, Politics, and the City in Fatimid Cairo* (Albany, 1994), ch. 1.

the outside expressed the Fātimid ruler's position as the Ismā'īli imām.<sup>44</sup> Even in the late eleventh and twelfth centuries, when the Fātimids were no longer effectively ruling their state, and when even their armies were mostly Sunnī, they still maintained a firm identity as Ismā'īli imams. The Aqmar mosque, built by the wazīr al-Ma'mūn al-Baṭā'iḥ during the reign of Caliph al-Āmir in 519/1125, had explicitly Ismā'īli decorative motifs and inscriptions on its facade.<sup>45</sup> As the mosques were constructed, they were progressively incorporated into the ritual life of the court and were included in the procession routes of the caliphs on special occasions.

Fustāt, which was not an Ismā'īli city, was also incorporated into the ceremonial life of the court. Long after Cairo was established, public life continued to revolve around the two congregational mosques of Fustāt – the Mosque of 'Amr and the Mosque of Ibn Tūlūn. In the early eleventh century, the Caliph al-Hākim began to lead Friday prayer in congregational mosques in both Cairo and Fustāt. By the twelfth century, Fustāt's mosques were regularly included in the ritual life of the Fātimid court. The caliphs led prayer in its congregational mosques during Ramadān and the Festivals, and they went in procession to Fustāt at the Islamic New Year, on the inundation of the Nile, and during Ramadān.

But the Fātimids did not present themselves in public solely as Ismā'īli imams. In the context of twelfth-century political and social realities – a civilian population and an army that were largely Sunnī – they also began to present themselves in broader terms as Islamic rulers. They reduced their emphasis on the explicitly Ismā'īli aspects of their rituals and participated in the public religious culture of the larger population at Fustāt. From the time of the Jamāli wazirs, the Festival of Fast-Breaking and the Sacrificial Festival were celebrated with voluminous distributions of food, ceremonial clothing, and money.

In the late Fātimid period, the court actively borrowed from the flourishing local religious tradition. In addition to the celebrations of festivals, they patronized the cult surrounding the veneration of the Prophet's family that had been a feature of Egyptian Islamic religious life since early Islamic times. In the twelfth century, their participation in these cultic activities became more systematic, and they built numerous tomb monuments dedicated to various descendants of the family of the Prophet. This presentation of the ruler in ways that could be invested equally with a specifically Ismā'īli and a broadly Islamic meaning typified late Fātimid court ritual life.<sup>46</sup>

<sup>44</sup> See Irene Bierman, *Writing Signs: The Fātimid Public Text*, (Berkeley, 1998).

<sup>45</sup> Bierman, *Writing Signs*; Caroline Williams, "The Cult of 'Alid Saints in the Fatimid Monuments of Cairo," *Muqarnas*, 1 (1983), 37–52; 3 (1985), 39–60.

<sup>46</sup> See Sanders, *Ritual, politics and the city*, 67–82; Christopher Taylor, "Reevaluating the Shi'i Role in the Development of Monumental Islamic Funerary Architecture: the Case of Egypt," *Muqarnas*, 9 (1992), 1–10; Williams, "Cult of 'Alid Saints."

This is not to say that Ismā‘īlism was no longer central to the Fātimids' view of themselves or of their state. Indeed, the Fātimid caliphs, in the face of two schisms, continued to insist on their special role as Ismā‘īlī imāms until the end of their dynasty. But the regime was characterized also by a certain pragmatism with regard to non-Ismā‘īlī and non-Muslim subjects. As in other Islamic regimes of the same era, Jews and Christians sometimes served in highly visible positions at court, and Sunnīs, especially in the later years of the dynasty, often held high positions in the Fātimid administration. After the middle of the eleventh century, even the chief judge of the Fātimid state did not have to be an Ismā‘īlī. For a time, these non-Ismā‘īlī judges were constrained to follow Ismā‘īlī law, but by the end of the eleventh century there is evidence to suggest that this was no longer the case. And while the Fātimids maintained their large propaganda mission (*da‘wa*) in other parts of the Islamic world, they do not seem to have emphasized their *da‘wa* in Egypt. The reasons for this remain obscure and constitute one of the most difficult and unresolved interpretive issues in Fātimid history.

THE RULERS OF EGYPT, 254–922/868–1517



*Tūlūnids, 254–292/868–905*

- |   |         |                                      |
|---|---------|--------------------------------------|
| 1 | 254/868 | Aḥmad ibn Tūlūn                      |
| 2 | 270/884 | Khumārawayh, Abū al-Jaysh (son of 1) |
| 3 | 282/896 | Jaysh, Abū al-‘Asākir (son of 2)     |
| 4 | 283/896 | Hārūn, Abū Mūsā (son of 2)           |
| 5 | 292/904 | Shaybān, Abū al-Manāqib (son of 1)   |

292/905 Reconquest by the ‘Abbāsid general Muḥammad ibn Sulaymān

*Ikhshidids, 323–358/935–969*

- |   |         |  |
|---|---------|--|
| 1 | 323/935 | Muhammad ibn Tughj, Abū Bakr al-Ikhshīd      |
| 2 | 334/946 | Ūnūjūr, Abū al-Qāsim (son of 1)              |
| 3 | 349/961 | ‘Ali, Abū al-Ḥasan (son of 1)                |
| 4 | 355/966 | Kāfur al-Lābī, Abū al-Misk                   |
| 5 | 357/968 | Aḥmad, Abū al-Fawāris, d. 371/981 (son of 3) |

358/969 Conquest of Egypt by Fāṭimids

*Fāṭimids, 297–567/909–1171*

- |   |         |   |
|---|---------|---|
| 1 | 297/909 | ‘Abd-Allāh (‘Ubayd-Allāh) ibn Husayn, Abū Muhammad al-Mahdī |
| 2 | 322/934 | Muhammad, Abū al-Qāsim al-Qa’im (son of 1?)                 |
| 3 | 334/946 | Ismā‘il, Abū Ṭāhir al-Manṣūr (son of 2)                     |
| 4 | 341/953 | Ma‘add, Abū Tamīm al-Mu‘izz (son of 3)                      |

358/969 Caliph in Egypt

- |   |          |   |
|---|----------|---|
| 5 | 365/975  | Nizār, Abū Manṣūr al-‘Azīz (son of 4)     |
| 6 | 386/996  | al-Manṣūr, Abū ‘Ali al-Ḥākim (son of 5)   |
| 7 | 411/1021 | ‘Alī, Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ẓāhir (son of 6)    |
| 8 | 427/1036 | Ma‘add, Abū Tamīm al-Muṣṭanṣir (son of 7) |

- 9 487/1094 Ahmād, Abū al-Qāsim al-Musta‘lī (son of 8)  
 10 495/1101 al-Manṣūr, Abū ‘Alī al-Āmir (son of 9)

524/1130 Interregnum; rule by al-Ḥāfiẓ as regent but not yet as caliph; coins were issued in the name of al-Muntaẓar (the Expected One)

- 11 525/1131 ‘Abd al-Majīd ibn Muḥammad, Abū al-Maymūn al-Ḥāfiẓ  
 12 544/1149 Ismā‘il, Abū al-Manṣūr al-Zāfir (son of 11)  
 13 549/1154 Ḥasan, Abū al-Qāsim al-Fā’iz (son of 12)  
 14 555–567/ ‘Abd-Allah ibn Yūsuf, Abū Muḥammad al-‘Ādīd  
 1160–1171 Ayyūbid Conquest

### *Ayyūbids, 564–650/1169–1252*

- 1 564/1169 Yūsuf ibn Ayyūb, al-Nāṣir Abū al-Muẓaffar Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn (Saladin)  
 2 589/1193 ‘Uthmān, al-‘Azīz Abū al-Fatḥ ‘Imād al-Dīn (son of 1)  
 3 595/1198 Muḥammad, al-Manṣūr Nāṣir al-Dīn (son of 2)  
 4 596/1200 Muḥammad/Ahmād ibn Ayyūb, al-‘Ādīl Abū Bakr Sayf al-Dīn (brother of 1)  
 5 615/1218 Muḥammad, al-Kāmil Abū al-Ma‘ālī Nāṣir al-Dīn (son of 4)  
 6 635/1238 Abū Bakr, al-‘Ādīl Sayf al-Dīn (son of 5)  
 7 637/1240 Ayyūb, al-Ṣāliḥ Najm al-Dīn (son of 5)  
 8 647/1249 Tūrān Shāh, al-Mu‘azzam Ghiyāth al-Dīn (son of 7)  
 9 648–650/ Mūsā ibn Yūsuf, al-Ashraf Muẓaffar al-Dīn

Mamlūk usurpation, al-Ashraf’s name retained in *khuṭba* until 652/1254

### *Mamlūks, 648–922/1250–1517*

Bahrī line, 648–792/1250–1390

- 1 648/1250 Shajarat al-Durr, Umm Khalīl, widow of al-Ṣāliḥ Ayyūb  
 2 648/1250 Aybak al-Turkumānī, al-Mu‘izz Izz al-Dīn  
 3 648/1250 Mūsā ibn Yūsuf, al-Ashraf, nominal Ayyūbid sultan  
 4 652/1254 Aybak, second reign  
 5 655/1257 ‘Alī I, al-Manṣūr Nūr al-Dīn (son of 4)  
 6 657/1259 Qutuz al-Mu‘izzī, al-Muẓaffar Sayf al-Dīn

- 7 658/1260 Baybars I al-Bunduqdāri, al-Zāhir Rukn al-Dīn
- 8 676/1277 Baraka/Berke Khān, al-Sa‘id Nāṣir al-Dīn (son of 7)
- 9 678/1279 Salāmish/Süley mish, al-‘Ādil Badr al-Dīn (son of 7)
- 10 678/1279 Qalāwūn al-Alfi, al-Manṣūr Abū al-Ma‘ālī Sayf al-Dīn
- 11 689/1290 Khalil, al-Ashraf Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn (son of 10)
- 12 693/1293 Muḥammad I, al-Nāṣir Nāṣir al-Dīn (son of 10) (first reign)
- 13 694/1294 Kitbughā, al-‘Ādil Zayn al-Dīn
- 14 696/1296 Lāchin/Lājin al-Ashqar, al-Manṣūr Husām al-Dīn
- 15 698/1299 Muḥammad I, al-Nāṣir (son of 10) (second reign)
- 16 708/1309 Baybars II al-Jashnakīr, al-Muẓaffar Rukn al-Dīn
- 17 709/1310 Muḥammad I, al-Nāṣir (son of 10) (third reign)
- 18 741/1341 Abū Bakr, al-Manṣūr Sayf al-Dīn (son of 17)
- 19 742/1341 Kūjūk/Küchük, al-Ashraf ‘Alā’ al-Dīn (son of 17)
- 20 742/1342 Ahmād I, al-Nāṣir Shihāb al-Dīn (son of 17)
- 21 743/1342 Ismā‘il, al-Ṣāliḥ ‘Imād al-Dīn (son of 17)
- 22 746/1345 Sha‘bān I, al-Kāmil Sayf al-Dīn (son of 17)
- 23 747/1346 Hajji I, al-Muẓaffar Sayf al-Dīn (son of 17)
- 24 748/1347 Hasan, al-Nāṣir Nāṣir al-Dīn (son of 17) (first reign)
- 25 752/1351 Ṣāliḥ, al-Ṣāliḥ Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn (son of 17)
- 26 755/1354 Hasan, al-Nāṣir (son of 17) (second reign)
- 27 762/1361 Muḥammad II, al-Manṣūr Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn (son of 23)
- 28 764/1363 Sha‘bān II ibn Husayn, al-Ashraf Nāṣir al-Dīn
- 29 778/1377 ‘Ali II, al-Manṣūr ‘Alā’ al-Dīn (son of 28)
- 30 783/1381 Hajji II, al-Ṣāliḥ/al-Manṣūr Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn (son of 28) (first reign)
- 31 784/1382 Barqūq al-Yalbughāwī, al-Zāhir Sayf al-Dīn (first reign)
- 32 791–792/1389–1390 Hajji II, al-Muẓaffar Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn (son of 28) (second reign)

## Burjī (Circassian) line, 784–922/1382–1517

- 33 784/1382 Barqūq al-Yalbughāwī, al-Zāhir (first reign)
- 34 791/1389 Ḥajjī II, Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn (son of 28) (second reign)
- 35 792/1390 Barqūq, al-Zāhir (second reign)
- 36 801/1399 Faraj, al-Nāṣir Nāṣir al-Dīn (son of 35) (first reign)
- 37 808/1405 ‘Abd al-‘Azīz, al-Manṣūr ‘Izz al-Dīn (son of 35)
- 38 808/1405 Faraj, al-Nāṣir (son of 35) (second reign)
- 39 815/1412 al-‘Abbās ibn al-Mutawakkil, Abū al-Faḍl al-Musta‘in, ‘Abbāsid caliph, proclaimed sultan
- 40 815/1412 Shaykh al-Mahmūdī al-Zāhirī, al-Mu’ayyad Sayf al-Dīn
- 41 824/1421 Aḥmad II, al-Muẓaffar (son of 40)
- 42 824/1421 Taṭar, al-Zāhir Sayf al-Dīn
- 43 824/1421 Muḥammad III, al-Ṣalīḥ Nāṣir al-Dīn (son of 42)
- 44 825/1422 Barsbāy, al-Ashraf Abū al-Nāṣir Sayf al-Dīn
- 45 841/1438 Yūsuf, al-‘Azīz Jamāl al-Dīn (son of 44)
- 46 842/1438 Chaqmaq/Jaqmaq, al-Zāhir Sayf al-Dīn
- 47 857/1453 ‘Uthmān, al-Manṣūr Fakhr al-Dīn (son of 46)
- 48 857/1453 Aynāl/Ināl al-‘Alā’ī al-Zāhirī, al-Ashraf Abū al-Nāṣir Sayf al-Dīn
- 49 865/1461 Aḥmad III, al-Mu’ayyad Shihāb al-Dīn (son of 48)
- 50 865/1461 Khushqadam, al-Zāhir Sayf al-Dīn
- 51 872/1467 Yalbāy, al-Zāhir Sayf al-Dīn
- 52 872/1467 Timurbughā, al-Zāhir
- 53 872/1468 Qāyit/Qāytbāy al-Zāhirī, al-Ashraf Abū al-Nāṣir Sayf al-Dīn
- 54 901/1496 Muḥammad IV, al-Nāṣir (son of 53)
- 55 904/1498 Qānṣawh/Qānṣūh I, al-Zāhir
- 56 905/1500 Jānbulāt/Jānbalāt, al-Ashraf
- 57 906/1501 Tūmānbāy I, al-‘Ādil Sayf al-Dīn
- 58 906/1501 Qānṣawh/Qānṣūh II al-Ghawrī, al-Ashraf
- 59 922–923/1516–1517 Tūmānbāy II, al-Ashraf

923/1517 Ottoman conquest

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### ABBREVIATIONS

<i>AI</i>	<i>Annales Islamologiques</i>
<i>BEO</i>	<i>Bulletin d'études orientales</i>
<i>BIE</i>	<i>Bulletin de l'Institut d'Egypte</i>
<i>BIFAO</i>	<i>Bulletin de l'Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale du Caire</i>
<i>BSOAS</i>	<i>Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies</i>
<i>EI<sub>2</sub></i>	<i>Encyclopaedia of Islam</i> , 2nd edition (Leiden, 1960–).
<i>EIR</i>	<i>Encyclopaedia Iranica</i>
<i>EPRO</i>	Études préliminaires aux religions orientales dans l'Empire romain (Leiden)
<i>IJMES</i>	<i>International Journal of Middle East Studies</i>
<i>JAOS</i>	<i>Journal of the American Oriental Society</i>
<i>JARCE</i>	<i>Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt</i>
<i>JESHO</i>	<i>Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient</i>
<i>JNES</i>	<i>Journal of Near Eastern Studies</i>
<i>JRAS</i>	<i>Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society</i>
<i>MESA</i>	Middle East Studies Association of North America (Tucson, AZ)
<i>MIFAO</i>	Mémoires publiés par les membres de l'Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale du Caire
<i>MW</i>	<i>The Muslim World</i>
<i>REI</i>	<i>Revue des études islamiques</i>
<i>SI</i>	<i>Studia Islamica</i>
<i>WO</i>	<i>Die Welt des Orients</i>

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